

A watercolor illustration of a rural scene. In the background, a large wooden windmill with four lattice-patterned sails stands on a grassy hill. To the left, a small figure in a white dress stands near a small orange-roofed building. To the right, a brown deer stands near another small figure. In the foreground, a woman with long brown hair, wearing a yellow dress over a pink long-sleeved shirt and red pants, stands holding a large bundle of sticks. The sky is filled with soft, yellow and white clouds. The overall style is whimsical and storybook-like.

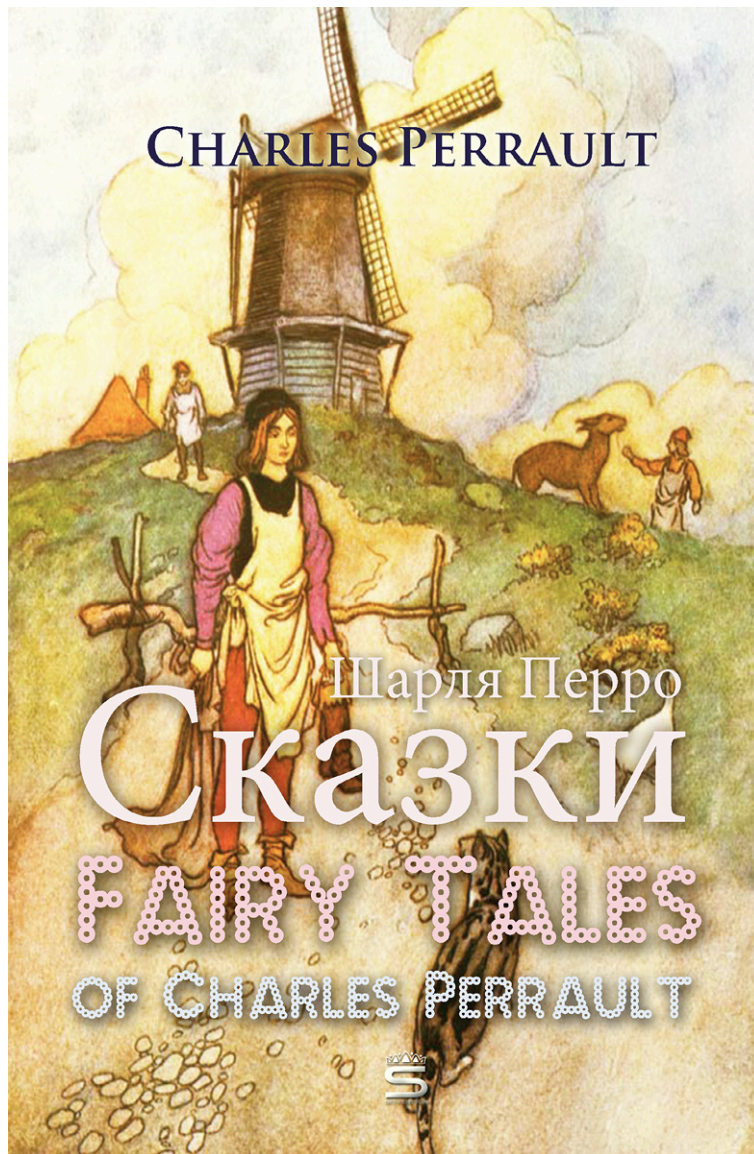
CHARLES PERRAULT

Шарля Перро

Сказки

FAIRY TALES
OF CHARLES PERRAULT





Charles Perrault

*Fairy Tales of
Charles Perrault*

English and Russian Language Edition



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ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDITION

LITTLE RED RIDING-HOOD

Once upon a time there lived in a certain village a little country girl, the prettiest creature that ever was seen. Her mother was very fond of her, and her grandmother loved her still more. This good woman made for her a little red riding-hood, which became the girl so well that everybody called her Little Red Riding-hood.

One day her mother, having made some custards, said to her:—

“Go, my dear, and see how your grandmother does, for I hear she has been very ill; carry her a custard and this little pot of butter.”

Little Red Riding-hood set out immediately to go to her grandmother’s, who lived in another village.

As she was going through the wood, she met Gaffer Wolf, who had a very great mind to eat her up; but he dared not, because of some fagot-makers hard by in the forest. He asked her whither she was going. The poor child, who did not know that it was dangerous to stay and hear a wolf talk, said to him:—

“I am going to see my grandmother, and carry her a custard and a little pot of butter from my mamma.”

“Does she live far off?” said the Wolf.

“Oh, yes,” answered Little Red Riding-hood; “it is beyond that mill you see there, the first house you come to in the village.”

“Well,” said the Wolf, “and I’ll go and see her, too. I’ll go this way, and you go that, and we shall see who will be there first.”

The Wolf began to run as fast as he could, taking the shortest way, and the little girl went by the longest way, amusing herself by gathering nuts, running after butterflies, and making nosegays of such little flowers as she met with. The Wolf was not long before he reached the old woman’s house. He knocked at the door—tap, tap, tap.

“Who’s there?” called the grandmother.

“Your grandchild, Little Red Riding-hood,” replied the Wolf, imitating her voice, “who has brought a custard and a little pot of butter sent to you by mamma.”

The good grandmother, who was in bed, because she was somewhat ill, cried out:—

“Pull the bobbin, and the latch will go up.”

The Wolf pulled the bobbin, and the door opened. He fell upon the good woman and ate her up in no time, for he had not eaten anything for more than three days. He then shut the door, went into the grandmother’s bed, and waited for Little Red Riding-hood, who came sometime afterward and knocked at the door—tap, tap, tap.

“Who’s there?” called the Wolf.

Little Red Riding-hood, hearing the big voice of the Wolf, was at first afraid; but thinking her grandmother had a cold, answered:—

“’Tis your grandchild, Little Red Riding-hood, who has brought you a custard and a little pot of butter sent to you by mamma.”

The Wolf cried out to her, softening his voice a little:—

“Pull the bobbin, and the latch will go up.”

Little Red Riding-hood pulled the bobbin, and the door opened.

The Wolf, seeing her come in, said to her, hiding himself under the bedclothes:—

“Put the custard and the little pot of butter upon the stool, and come and lie down with me.”

Little Red Riding-hood undressed herself and went into bed, where she was much surprised to see how her grandmother looked in her night-clothes.

She said to her:—

“Grandmamma, what great arms you have got!”

“That is the better to hug thee, my dear.”

“Grandmamma, what great legs you have got!”

“That is to run the better, my child.”

“Grandmamma, what great ears you have got!”

“That is to hear the better, my child.”

“Grandmamma, what great eyes you have got!”

“It is to see the better, my child.”

“Grandmamma, what great teeth you have got!”

“That is to eat thee up.”

And, saying these words, this wicked Wolf fell upon Little Red Riding-hood, and ate her all up.

THE SLEEPING BEAUTY

Once upon a time there was a king and a queen, who were very sorry that they had no children,—so sorry that it cannot be told.

At last, however, the Queen had a daughter. There was a very fine christening; and the Princess had for her godmothers all the fairies they could find in the whole kingdom (there were seven of them), so that every one of them might confer a gift upon her, as was the custom of fairies in those days. By this means the Princess had all the perfections imaginable.

After the christening was over, the company returned to the King's palace, where was prepared a great feast for the fairies. There was placed before every one of them a magnificent cover with a case of massive gold, wherein were a spoon, and a knife and fork, all of pure gold set with diamonds and rubies. But as they were all sitting down at table they saw a very old fairy come into the hall. She had not been invited, because for more than fifty years she had not been out of a certain tower, and she was believed to be either dead or enchanted.

The King ordered her a cover, but he could not give her a case of gold as the others had, because seven only had been made for the seven fairies. The old fairy fancied she was slighted, and muttered threats between her teeth. One of the young fairies who sat near heard her, and, judging that she might give the little Princess some unlucky gift, hid herself behind the curtains as soon as they left the table. She hoped that she might speak last and undo as much as she could the evil which the old fairy might do.

In the meanwhile all the fairies began to give their gifts to the Princess. The youngest gave her for her gift that she should be the most beautiful person in the world; the next, that she should have the wit of an angel; the third, that she should be able to do everything she did gracefully; the fourth, that she should dance perfectly; the fifth, that she should sing like a nightingale; and the sixth, that she should play all kinds of musical instruments to the fullest perfection.

The old fairy's turn coming next, her head shaking more with spite than with age, she said that the Princess should pierce her hand with

a spindle and die of the wound. This terrible gift made the whole company tremble, and everybody fell a-crying.

At this very instant the young fairy came from behind the curtains and said these words in a loud voice:—

“Assure yourselves, O King and Queen, that your daughter shall not die of this disaster. It is true, I have no power to undo entirely what my elder has done. The Princess shall indeed pierce her hand with a spindle; but, instead of dying, she shall only fall into a deep sleep, which shall last a hundred years, at the end of which a king’s son shall come and awake her.”

The King, to avoid the misfortune foretold by the old fairy, issued orders forbidding any one, on pain of death, to spin with a distaff and spindle, or to have a spindle in his house. About fifteen or sixteen years after, the King and Queen being absent at one of their country villas, the young Princess was one day running up and down the palace; she went from room to room, and at last she came into a little garret on the top of the tower, where a good old woman, alone, was spinning with her spindle. This good woman had never heard of the King’s orders against spindles.

“What are you doing there, my good woman?” said the Princess.

“I am spinning, my pretty child,” said the old woman, who did not know who the Princess was.

“Ha!” said the Princess, “this is very pretty; how do you do it? Give it to me. Let me see if I can do it.”

She had no sooner taken it into her hand than, either because she was too quick and heedless, or because the decree of the fairy had so ordained, it ran into her hand, and she fell down in a swoon.

The good old woman, not knowing what to do, cried out for help. People came in from every quarter; they threw water upon the face of the Princess, unlaced her, struck her on the palms of her hands, and rubbed her temples with cologne water; but nothing would bring her to herself.

Then the King, who came up at hearing the noise, remembered what the fairies had foretold. He knew very well that this must come to pass, since the fairies had foretold it, and he caused the Princess to be carried into the finest room in his palace, and to be laid upon a

bed all embroidered with gold and silver. One would have taken her for a little angel, she was so beautiful; for her swooning had not dimmed the brightness of her complexion: her cheeks were carnation, and her lips coral. It is true her eyes were shut, but she was heard to breathe softly, which satisfied those about her that she was not dead.

The King gave orders that they should let her sleep quietly till the time came for her to awake. The good fairy who had saved her life by condemning her to sleep a hundred years was in the kingdom of Matakin, twelve thousand leagues off, when this accident befell the Princess; but she was instantly informed of it by a little dwarf, who had seven-leagued boots, that is, boots with which he could stride over seven leagues of ground at once. The fairy started off at once, and arrived, about an hour later, in a fiery chariot drawn by dragons.

The King handed her out of the chariot, and she approved everything he had done; but as she had very great foresight, she thought that when the Princess should awake she might not know what to do with herself, if she was all alone in this old palace. This was what she did: she touched with her wand everything in the palace (except the King and Queen),—governesses, maids of honor, ladies of the bedchamber, gentlemen, officers, stewards, cooks, undercooks, kitchen maids, guards with their porters, pages, and footmen; she likewise touched all the horses which were in the stables, the cart horses, the hunters and the saddle horses, the grooms, the great dogs in the outward court, and little Mopsey, too, the Princess's spaniel, which was lying on the bed.

As soon as she touched them they all fell asleep, not to awake again until their mistress did, that they might be ready to wait upon her when she wanted them. The very spits at the fire, as full as they could hold of partridges and pheasants, fell asleep, and the fire itself as well. All this was done in a moment. Fairies are not long in doing their work.

And now the King and Queen, having kissed their dear child without waking her, went out of the palace and sent forth orders that nobody should come near it.

These orders were not necessary; for in a quarter of an hour's time there grew up all round about the park such a vast number of trees, great and small, bushes and brambles, twining one within another, that neither man nor beast could pass through; so that nothing could be seen but the very top of the towers of the palace; and that, too, only from afar off. Every one knew that this also was the work of the fairy in order that while the Princess slept she should have nothing to fear from curious people.

After a hundred years the son of the King then reigning, who was of another family from that of the sleeping Princess, was a-hunting on that side of the country, and he asked what those towers were which he saw in the middle of a great thick wood. Every one answered according as they had heard. Some said that it was an old haunted castle, others that all the witches of the country held their midnight revels there, but the common opinion was that it was an ogre's dwelling, and that he carried to it all the little children he could catch, so as to eat them up at his leisure, without any one being able to follow him, for he alone had the power to make his way through the wood.

The Prince did not know what to believe, and presently a very aged countryman spake to him thus:—

“May it please your royal Highness, more than fifty years since I heard from my father that there was then in this castle the most beautiful princess that was ever seen; that she must sleep there a hundred years, and that she should be waked by a king's son, for whom she was reserved.”

The young Prince on hearing this was all on fire. He thought, without weighing the matter, that he could put an end to this rare adventure; and, pushed on by love and the desire of glory, resolved at once to look into it.

As soon as he began to get near to the wood, all the great trees, the bushes, and brambles gave way of themselves to let him pass through. He walked up to the castle which he saw at the end of a large avenue; and you can imagine he was a good deal surprised when he saw none of his people following him, because the trees closed again as soon as he had passed through them. However, he

did not cease from continuing his way; a young prince in search of glory is ever valiant.

He came into a spacious outer court, and what he saw was enough to freeze him with horror. A frightful silence reigned over all; the image of death was everywhere, and there was nothing to be seen but what seemed to be the outstretched bodies of dead men and animals. He, however, very well knew, by the ruby faces and pimpled noses of the porters, that they were only asleep; and their goblets, wherein still remained some drops of wine, showed plainly that they had fallen asleep while drinking their wine.

He then crossed a court paved with marble, went up the stairs, and came into the guard chamber, where guards were standing in their ranks, with their muskets upon their shoulders, and snoring with all their might. He went through several rooms full of gentlemen and ladies, some standing and others sitting, but all were asleep. He came into a gilded chamber, where he saw upon a bed, the curtains of which were all open, the most beautiful sight ever beheld—a princess who appeared to be about fifteen or sixteen years of age, and whose bright and resplendent beauty had something divine in it. He approached with trembling and admiration, and fell down upon his knees before her.

Then, as the end of the enchantment was come, the Princess awoke, and looking on him with eyes more tender than could have been expected at first sight, said:—

“Is it you, my Prince? You have waited a long while.”

The Prince, charmed with these words, and much more with the manner in which they were spoken, knew not how to show his joy and gratitude; he assured her that he loved her better than he did himself. Their discourse was not very connected, but they were the better pleased, for where there is much love there is little eloquence. He was more at a loss than she, and we need not wonder at it; she had had time to think of what to say to him; for it is evident (though history says nothing of it) that the good fairy, during so long a sleep, had given her very pleasant dreams. In short, they talked together for four hours, and then they said not half they had to say.

In the meanwhile all the palace had woke up with the Princess; every one thought upon his own business, and as they were not in love, they were ready to die of hunger. The lady of honor, being as sharp set as the other folks, grew very impatient, and told the Princess aloud that the meal was served. The Prince helped the Princess to rise. She was entirely and very magnificently dressed; but his royal Highness took care not to tell her that she was dressed like his great-grandmother, and had a high collar. She looked not a bit the less charming and beautiful for all that.

They went into the great mirrored hall, where they supped, and were served by the officers of the Princess's household. The violins and hautboys played old tunes, but they were excellent, though they had not been played for a hundred years; and after supper, without losing any time, the lord almoner married them in the chapel of the castle. They had but very little sleep—the Princess scarcely needed any; and the Prince left her next morning to return into the city, where his father was greatly troubled about him.

The Prince told him that he lost his way in the forest as he was hunting, and that he had slept in the cottage of a charcoal-burner, who gave him cheese and brown bread.

The King, his father, who was a good man, believed him; but his mother could not be persuaded that it was true; and seeing that he went almost every day a-hunting, and that he always had some excuse ready for so doing, though he had been out three or four nights together, she began to suspect that he was married; for he lived thus with the Princess above two whole years, during which they had two children, the elder, a daughter, was named Dawn, and the younger, a son, they called Day, because he was a great deal handsomer than his sister.

The Queen spoke several times to her son, to learn after what manner he was passing his time, and told him that in this he ought in duty to satisfy her. But he never dared to trust her with his secret; he feared her, though he loved her, for she was of the race of the Ogres, and the King married her for her vast riches alone. It was even whispered about the Court that she had Ogreish inclinations, and that, whenever she saw little children passing by, she had all the

difficulty in the world to prevent herself from falling upon them. And so the Prince would never tell her one word.

But when the King was dead, which happened about two years afterward, and he saw himself lord and master, he openly declared his marriage: and he went in great state to conduct his Queen to the palace. They made a magnificent entry into the capital city, she riding between her two children.

Soon after, the King made war on Emperor Cantalabutte, his neighbor. He left the government of the kingdom to the Queen, his mother, and earnestly commended his wife and children to her care. He was obliged to carry on the war all the summer, and as soon as he left, the Queen-mother sent her daughter-in-law and her children to a country house among the woods, that she might with the more ease gratify her horrible longing. Some few days afterward she went thither herself, and said to her head cook:—

“I intend to eat little Dawn for my dinner to-morrow.”

“O! madam!” cried the head cook.

“I will have it so,” replied the Queen (and this she spoke in the tone of an Ogress who had a strong desire to eat fresh meat), “and will eat her with a sharp sauce.”

The poor man, knowing very well that he must not play tricks with Ogresses, took his great knife and went up into little Dawn’s chamber. She was then nearly four years old, and came up to him, jumping and laughing, to put her arms round his neck, and ask him for some sugar-candy. Upon which he began to weep, the great knife fell out of his hand, and he went into the back yard and killed a little lamb, and dressed it with such good sauce that his mistress assured him she had never eaten anything so good in her life. He had at the same time taken up little Dawn and carried her to his wife, to conceal her in his lodging at the end of the courtyard.

Eight days afterwards the wicked Queen said to the chief cook, “I will sup upon little Day.”

He answered not a word, being resolved to cheat her again as he had done before. He went to find little Day, and saw him with a foil in his hand, with which he was fencing with a great monkey: the child was then only three years of age. He took him up in his arms

and carried him to his wife, that she might conceal him in her chamber along with his sister, and instead of little Day he served up a young and very tender kid, which the Ogress found to be wonderfully good.

All had gone well up to now; but one evening this wicked Queen said to her chief cook:—

“I will eat the Queen with the same sauce I had with her children.”

Now the poor chief cook was in despair and could not imagine how to deceive her again. The young Queen was over twenty years old, not reckoning the hundred years she had been asleep: and how to find something to take her place greatly puzzled him. He then decided, to save his own life, to cut the Queen’s throat; and going up into her chamber, with intent to do it at once, he put himself into as great fury as he possibly could, and came into the young Queen’s room with his dagger in his hand. He would not, however, deceive her, but told her, with a great deal of respect, the orders he had received from the Queen-mother.

“Do it; do it,” she said, stretching out her neck. “Carry out your orders, and then I shall go and see my children, my poor children, whom I loved so much and so tenderly.”

For she thought them dead, since they had been taken away without her knowledge.

“No, no, madam,” cried the poor chief cook, all in tears; “you shall not die, and you shall see your children again at once. But then you must go home with me to my lodgings, where I have concealed them, and I will deceive the Queen once more, by giving her a young hind in your stead.”

Upon this he forthwith conducted her to his room, where, leaving her to embrace her children, and cry along with them, he went and dressed a young hind, which the Queen had for her supper, and devoured with as much appetite as if it had been the young Queen. She was now well satisfied with her cruel deeds, and she invented a story to tell the King on his return, of how the Queen his wife and her two children had been devoured by mad wolves.

One evening, as she was, according to her custom, rambling round about the courts and yards of the palace to see if she could smell any

fresh meat, she heard, in a room on the ground floor, little Day crying, for his mamma was going to whip him, because he had been naughty; and she heard, at the same time, little Dawn begging mercy for her brother.

The Ogress knew the voice of the Queen and her children at once, and being furious at having been thus deceived, she gave orders (in a most horrible voice which made everybody tremble) that, next morning by break of day, they should bring into the middle of the great court a large tub filled with toads, vipers, snakes, and all sorts of serpents, in order to have the Queen and her children, the chief cook, his wife and maid, thrown into it, all of whom were to be brought thither with their hands tied behind them.

They were brought out accordingly, and the executioners were just going to throw them into the tub, when the King, who was not so soon expected, entered the court on horseback and asked, with the utmost astonishment, what was the meaning of that horrible spectacle.

No one dared to tell him, when the Ogress, all enraged to see what had happened, threw herself head foremost into the tub, and was instantly devoured by the ugly creatures she had ordered to be thrown into it to kill the others. The King was of course very sorry, for she was his mother; but he soon comforted himself with his beautiful wife and his pretty children.

PUSS IN BOOTS

Once upon a time there was a miller who left no more riches to the three sons he had than his mill, his ass, and his cat. The division was soon made. Neither the lawyer nor the attorney was sent for. They would soon have eaten up all the poor property. The eldest had the mill, the second the ass, and the youngest nothing but the cat.

The youngest, as we can understand, was quite unhappy at having so poor a share.

“My brothers,” said he, “may get their living handsomely enough by joining their stocks together; but, for my part, when I have eaten up my cat, and made me a muff of his skin, I must die of hunger.”

The Cat, who heard all this, without appearing to take any notice, said to him with a grave and serious air:—

“Do not thus afflict yourself, my master; you have nothing else to do but to give me a bag, and get a pair of boots made for me, that I may scamper through the brambles, and you shall see that you have not so poor a portion in me as you think.”

Though the Cat’s master did not think much of what he said, he had seen him play such cunning tricks to catch rats and mice—hanging himself by the heels, or hiding himself in the meal, to make believe he was dead—that he did not altogether despair of his helping him in his misery. When the Cat had what he asked for, he booted himself very gallantly, and putting his bag about his neck, he held the strings of it in his two forepaws, and went into a warren where was a great number of rabbits. He put bran and sow-thistle into his bag, and, stretching out at length, as if he were dead, he waited for some young rabbits, not yet acquainted with the deceits of the world, to come and rummage his bag for what he had put into it.

Scarcely was he settled but he had what he wanted. A rash and foolish young rabbit jumped into his bag, and Monsieur Puss, immediately drawing close the strings, took him and killed him at once. Proud of his prey, he went with it to the palace, and asked to

speak with the King. He was shown upstairs into his Majesty's apartment, and, making a low bow to the King, he said:—

“I have brought you, sire, a rabbit which my noble Lord, the Master of Carabas” (for that was the title which Puss was pleased to give his master) “has commanded me to present to your Majesty from him.”

“Tell thy master,” said the King, “that I thank him, and that I am pleased with his gift.”

Another time he went and hid himself among some standing corn, still holding his bag open; and when a brace of partridges ran into it, he drew the strings, and so caught them both. He then went and made a present of these to the King, as he had done before of the rabbit which he took in the warren. The King, in like manner, received the partridges with great pleasure, and ordered his servants to reward him.

The Cat continued for two or three months thus to carry his Majesty, from time to time, some of his master's game. One day when he knew that the King was to take the air along the riverside, with his daughter, the most beautiful princess in the world, he said to his master:—

“If you will follow my advice, your fortune is made. You have nothing else to do but go and bathe in the river, just at the spot I shall show you, and leave the rest to me.”

The Marquis of Carabas did what the Cat advised him to, without knowing what could be the use of doing it. While he was bathing, the King passed by, and the Cat cried out with all his might:—

“Help! help! My Lord the Marquis of Carabas is drowning!”

At this noise the King put his head out of the coach window, and seeing the Cat who had so often brought him game, he commanded his guards to run immediately to the assistance of his Lordship the Marquis of Carabas.

While they were drawing the poor Marquis out of the river, the Cat came up to the coach and told the King that, while his master was bathing, there came by some rogues, who ran off with his clothes, though he had cried out, “Thieves! thieves!” several times, as loud as he could. The cunning Cat had hidden the clothes under a great stone. The King immediately commanded the officers of his

wardrobe to run and fetch one of his best suits for the Lord Marquis of Carabas.

The King was extremely polite to him, and as the fine clothes he had given him set off his good looks (for he was well made and handsome), the King's daughter found him very much to her liking, and the Marquis of Carabas had no sooner cast two or three respectful and somewhat tender glances than she fell in love with him to distraction. The King would have him come into the coach and take part in the airing. The Cat, overjoyed to see his plan begin to succeed, marched on before, and, meeting with some countrymen, who were mowing a meadow, he said to them:—

“Good people, you who are mowing, if you do not tell the King that the meadow you mow belongs to my Lord Marquis of Carabas, you shall be chopped as small as herbs for the pot.”

The King did not fail to ask the mowers to whom the meadow they were mowing belonged.

“To my Lord Marquis of Carabas,” answered they all together, for the Cat's threat had made them afraid.

“You have a good property there,” said the King to the Marquis of Carabas.

“You see, sire,” said the Marquis, “this is a meadow which never fails to yield a plentiful harvest every year.”

The Master Cat, who went still on before, met with some reapers, and said to them:—

“Good people, you who are reaping, if you do not say that all this corn belongs to the Marquis of Carabas, you shall be chopped as small as herbs for the pot.”

The King, who passed by a moment after, wished to know to whom belonged all that corn, which he then saw.

“To my Lord Marquis of Carabas,” replied the reapers, and the King was very well pleased with it, as well as the Marquis, whom he congratulated thereupon. The Master Cat, who went always before, said the same thing to all he met, and the King was astonished at the vast estates of my Lord Marquis of Carabas.

Monsieur Puss came at last to a stately castle, the master of which was an Ogre, the richest ever known; for all the lands which the King

had then passed through belonged to this castle. The Cat, who had taken care to inform himself who this Ogre was and what he could do, asked to speak with him, saying he could not pass so near his castle without having the honor of paying his respects to him.

The Ogre received him as civilly as an Ogre could do, and made him sit down.

“I have been assured,” said the Cat, “that you have the gift of being able to change yourself into all sorts of creatures you have a mind to; that you can, for example, transform yourself into a lion, or elephant, and the like.”

“That is true,” answered the Ogre, roughly; “and to convince you, you shall see me now become a lion.”

Puss was so terrified at the sight of a lion so near him that he immediately climbed into the gutter, not without much trouble and danger, because of his boots, which were of no use at all to him for walking upon the tiles. A little while after, when Puss saw that the Ogre had resumed his natural form, he came down, and owned he had been very much frightened.

“I have, moreover, been informed,” said the Cat, “but I know not how to believe it, that; you have also the power to take on you the shape of the smallest animals; for example, to change yourself into a rat or a mouse, but I must own to you I take this to be impossible.”

“Impossible!” cried the Ogre; “you shall see.” And at the same time he changed himself into a mouse, and began to run about the floor. Puss no sooner perceived this than he fell upon him and ate him up.

Meanwhile, the King, who saw, as he passed, this fine castle of the Ogre’s, had a mind to go into it. Puss, who heard the noise of his Majesty’s coach coming over the drawbridge, ran out, and said to the King, “Your Majesty is welcome to this castle of my Lord Marquis of Carabas.”

“What! my Lord Marquis,” cried the King, “and does this castle also belong to you? There can be nothing finer than this courtyard and all the stately buildings which surround it; let us see the interior, if you please.”

The Marquis gave his hand to the young Princess, and followed the King, who went first. They passed into the great hall, where they

found a magnificent collation, which the Ogre had prepared for his friends, who were that very day to visit him, but dared not to enter, knowing the King was there. His Majesty, charmed with the good qualities of my Lord of Carabas, as was also his daughter, who had fallen violently in love with him, and seeing the vast estate he possessed, said to him:—

“It will be owing to yourself only, my Lord Marquis, if you are not my son-in-law.”

The Marquis, with low bows, accepted the honor which his Majesty conferred upon him, and forthwith that very same day married the Princess.

Puss became a great lord, and never ran after mice any more except for his diversion.

LITTLE THUMB

Once upon a time there was a fagot-maker and his wife, who had seven children, all boys. The eldest was but ten years old, and the youngest only seven.

They were very poor, and their seven children were a great source of trouble to them because not one of them was able to earn his bread. What gave them yet more uneasiness was that the youngest was very delicate, and scarce ever spoke a word, which made people take for stupidity that which was a sign of good sense. He was very little, and when born he was no bigger than one's thumb; hence he was called Little Thumb.

The poor child was the drudge of the household, and was always in the wrong. He was, however, the most bright and discreet of all the brothers; and if he spoke little, he heard and thought the more.

There came a very bad year, and the famine was so great that these poor people resolved to rid themselves of their children. One evening, when they were in bed, and the fagot-maker was sitting with his wife at the fire, he said to her, with his heart ready to burst with grief:—

“You see plainly that we no longer can give our children food, and I cannot bear to see them die of hunger before my eyes; I am resolved to lose them in the wood to-morrow, which may very easily be done, for, while they amuse themselves in tying up fagots, we have only to run away and leave them without their seeing us.”

“Ah!” cried out his wife, “could you really take the children and lose them?”

In vain did her husband represent to her their great poverty; she would not consent to it. She was poor, but she was their mother.

However, having considered what a grief it would be to her to see them die of hunger, she consented, and went weeping to bed.

Little Thumb heard all they had said; for, hearing that they were talking business, he got up softly and slipped under his father's seat, so as to hear without being seen. He went to bed again, but did not sleep a wink all the rest of the night, thinking of what he had to do.

He got up early in the morning, and went to the brookside, where he filled his pockets full of small white pebbles, and then returned home. They all went out, but Little Thumb never told his brothers a word of what he knew.

They went into a very thick forest, where they could not see one another at ten paces apart. The fagot-maker began to cut wood, and the children to gather up sticks to make fagots. Their father and mother, seeing them busy at their work, got away from them unbeknown and then all at once ran as fast as they could through a winding by-path.

When the children found they were alone, they began to cry with all their might. Little Thumb let them cry on, knowing very well how to get home again; for, as he came, he had dropped the little white pebbles he had in his pockets all along the way. Then he said to them, "Do not be afraid, my brothers,—father and mother have left us here, but I will lead you home again; only follow me."

They followed, and he brought them home by the very same way they had come into the forest. They dared not go in at first, but stood outside the door to listen to what their father and mother were saying.

The very moment the fagot-maker and his wife reached home the lord of the manor sent them ten crowns, which he had long owed them, and which they never hoped to see. This gave them new life, for the poor people were dying of hunger. The fagot-maker sent his wife to the butcher's at once. As it was a long while since they had eaten, she bought thrice as much meat as was needed for supper for two people. When they had eaten, the woman said:—

"Alas! where are our poor children now? They would make a good feast of what we have left here; it was you, William, who wished to lose them. I told you we should repent of it. What are they now doing in the forest? Alas! perhaps the wolves have already eaten them up; you are very inhuman thus to have lost your children."

The fagot-maker grew at last quite out of patience, for she repeated twenty times that he would repent of it, and that she was in the right. He threatened to beat her if she did not hold her tongue. The fagot-

maker was, perhaps, more sorry than his wife, but she teased him so he could not endure it. She wept bitterly, saying:—

“Alas! where are my children now, my poor children?”

She said this once so very loud that the children, who were at the door, heard her and cried out all together:—

“Here we are! Here we are!”

She ran immediately to let them in, and said as she embraced them:—

“How happy I am to see you again, my dear children; you are very tired and very hungry, and, my poor Peter, you are covered with mud. Come in and let me clean you.”

Peter was her eldest son, whom she loved more than all the rest, because he was red haired, as she was herself.

They sat down to table, and ate with an appetite which pleased both father and mother, to whom they told how frightened they were in the forest, nearly all speaking at once. The good folk were delighted to see their children once more, and this joy continued while the ten crowns lasted. But when the money was all spent, they fell again into their former uneasiness, and resolved to lose their children again. And, that they might be the surer of doing it, they determined to take them much farther than before.

They could not talk of this so secretly but they were overheard by Little Thumb, who laid his plans to get out of the difficulty as he had done before; but, though he got up very early to go and pick up some little pebbles, he could not, for he found the house-door double-locked. He did not know what to do. Their father had given each of them a piece of bread for their breakfast. He reflected that he might make use of the bread instead of the pebbles, by throwing crumbs all along the way they should pass, and so he stuffed it in his pocket. Their father and mother led them into the thickest and most obscure part of the forest, and then, stealing away into a by-path, left them there. Little Thumb was not very much worried about it, for he thought he could easily find the way again by means of his bread, which he had scattered all along as he came; but he was very much surprised when he could not find a single crumb: the birds had come and eaten them all.

They were now in great trouble; for the more they wandered, the deeper they went into the forest. Night now fell, and there arose a high wind, which filled them with fear. They fancied they heard on every side the howling of wolves coming to devour them. They scarce dared to speak or turn their heads. Then it rained very hard, which wetted them to the skin. Their feet slipped at every step, and they fell into the mud, covering their hands with it so that they knew not what to do with them.

Little Thumb climbed up to the top of a tree, to see if he could discover anything. Looking on every side, he saw at last a glimmering light, like that of a candle, but a long way beyond the forest. He came down, and, when upon the ground, he could see it no more, which grieved him sadly. However, having walked for some time with his brothers toward that side on which he had seen the light, he discovered it again as he came out of the wood.

They arrived at last at the house where this candle was, not without many frights; for very often they lost sight of it, which happened every time they came into a hollow. They knocked at the door, and a good woman came and opened it.

She asked them what they wanted. Little Thumb told her they were poor children who were lost in the forest, and desired to lodge there for charity's sake. The woman, seeing them all so very pretty, began to weep and said to them: "Alas! poor babies, where do you come from? Do you know that this house belongs to a cruel Ogre who eats little children?"

"Alas! dear madam," answered Little Thumb (who, with his brothers, was trembling in every limb), "what shall we do? The wolves of the forest surely will devour us to-night if you refuse us shelter in your house; and so we would rather the gentleman should eat us. Perhaps he may take pity upon us if you will be pleased to ask him to do so."

The Ogre's wife, who believed she could hide them from her husband till morning, let them come in, and took them to warm themselves at a very good fire; for there was a whole sheep roasting for the Ogre's supper.

As they began to warm themselves they heard three or four great raps at the door; this was the Ogre, who was come home. His wife quickly hid them under the bed and went to open the door. The Ogre at once asked if supper was ready and the wine drawn, and then sat himself down to table. The sheep was as yet all raw, but he liked it the better for that. He sniffed about to the right and left, saying:—

“I smell fresh meat.”

“What you smell,” said his wife, “must be the calf which I have just now killed and flayed.”

“I smell fresh meat, I tell you once more,” replied the Ogre, looking crossly at his wife, “and there is something here which I do not understand.”

As he spoke these words he got up from the table and went straight to the bed.

“Ah!” said he, “that is how you would cheat me; I know not why I do not eat you, too; it is well for you that you are tough. Here is game, which comes very luckily to entertain three Ogres of my acquaintance who are to pay me a visit in a day or two.”

He dragged them out from under the bed, one by one. The poor children fell upon their knees and begged his pardon, but they had to do with one of the most cruel of Ogres, who, far from having any pity on them, was already devouring them in his mind, and told his wife they would be delicate eating when she had made a good sauce.

He then took a great knife, and, coming up to these poor children, sharpened it upon a great whetstone which he held in his left hand. He had already taken hold of one of them when his wife said to him:

—
“What need you do it now? Will you not have time enough to-morrow?”

“Hold your prating,” said the Ogre; “they will eat the tenderer.”

“But you have so much meat already,” replied his wife; “here are a calf, two sheep, and half a pig.”

“That is true,” said the Ogre; “give them a good supper that they may not grow thin, and put them to bed.”

The good woman was overjoyed at this, and gave them a good supper; but they were so much afraid that they could not eat. As for

the Ogre, he sat down again to drink, being highly pleased that he had the wherewithal to treat his friends. He drank a dozen glasses more than ordinary, which got up into his head and obliged him to go to bed.

The Ogre had seven daughters, who were still little children. These young Ogresses had all of them very fine complexions; but they all had little gray eyes, quite round, hooked noses, a very large mouth, and very long, sharp teeth, set far apart. They were not as yet wicked, but they promised well to be, for they had already bitten little children.

They had been put to bed early, all seven in one bed, with every one a crown of gold upon her head. There was in the same chamber a bed of the like size, and the Ogre's wife put the seven little boys into this bed, after which she went to bed herself.

Little Thumb, who had observed that the Ogre's daughters had crowns of gold upon their heads, and was afraid lest the Ogre should repent his not killing them that evening, got up about midnight, and, taking his brothers' bonnets and his own, went very softly and put them upon the heads of the seven little Ogresses, after having taken off their crowns of gold, which he put upon his own head and his brothers', so that the Ogre might take them for his daughters, and his daughters for the little boys whom he wanted to kill.

Things turned out just as he had thought; for the Ogre, waking about midnight, regretted that he had deferred till morning to do that which he might have done overnight, and jumped quickly out of bed, taking his great knife.

"Let us see," said he, "how our little rogues do, and not make two jobs of the matter."

He then went up, groping all the way, into his daughters' chamber; and, coming to the bed where the little boys lay, and who were all fast asleep, except Little Thumb, who was terribly afraid when he found the Ogre fumbling about his head, as he had done about his brothers', he felt the golden crowns, and said:—

"I should have made a fine piece of work of it, truly; it is clear I drank too much last night."

Then he went to the bed where the girls lay, and, having found the boys' little bonnets:—

“Ah!” said he, “my merry lads, are you there? Let us work boldly.”

And saying these words, without more ado, he cruelly murdered all his seven daughters. Well pleased with what he had done, he went to bed again.

So soon as Little Thumb heard the Ogre snore, he waked his brothers, and bade them put on their clothes quickly and follow him. They stole softly into the garden and got over the wall. They ran about, all night, trembling all the while, without knowing which way they went.

The Ogre, when he woke, said to his wife: “Go upstairs and dress those young rascals who came here last night.” The Ogress was very much surprised at this goodness of her husband, not dreaming after what manner she should dress them; but, thinking that he had ordered her to go up and put on their clothes, she went, and was horrified when she perceived her seven daughters all dead.

She began by fainting away, as was only natural in such a case. The Ogre, fearing his wife was too long in doing what he had ordered, went up himself to help her. He was no less amazed than his wife at this frightful spectacle.

“Ah! what have I done?” cried he. “The wretches shall pay for it, and that instantly.”

He threw a pitcher of water upon his wife's face, and having brought her to herself, “Give me quickly,” cried he, “my seven-leagued boots, that I may go and catch them.”

He went out into the country, and, after running in all directions, he came at last into the very road where the poor children were, and not above a hundred paces from their father's house. They espied the Ogre, who went at one step from mountain to mountain, and over rivers as easily as the narrowest brooks. Little Thumb, seeing a hollow rock near the place where they were, hid his brothers in it, and crowded into it himself, watching always what would become of the Ogre.

The Ogre, who found himself tired with his long and fruitless journey (for these boots of seven leagues greatly taxed the wearer),

had a great mind to rest himself, and, by chance, went to sit down upon the rock in which the little boys had hidden themselves. As he was worn out with fatigue, he fell asleep, and, after reposing himself some time, began to snore so frightfully that the poor children were no less afraid of him than when he held up his great knife and was going to take their lives. Little Thumb was not so much frightened as his brothers, and told them that they should run away at once toward home while the Ogre was asleep so soundly, and that they need not be in any trouble about him. They took his advice, and got home quickly.

Little Thumb then went close to the Ogre, pulled off his boots gently, and put them on his own legs. The boots were very long and large, but as they were fairy boots, they had the gift of becoming big or little, according to the legs of those who wore them; so that they fitted his feet and legs as well as if they had been made for him. He went straight to the Ogre's house, where he saw his wife crying bitterly for the loss of her murdered daughters.

"Your husband," said Little Thumb, "is in very great danger, for he has been taken by a gang of thieves, who have sworn to kill him if he does not give them all his gold and silver. At the very moment they held their daggers at his throat he perceived me and begged me to come and tell you the condition he was in, and to say that you should give me all he has of value, without retaining any one thing; for otherwise they will kill him without mercy. As his case is very pressing, he desired me to make use of his seven-leagued boots, which you see I have on, so that I might make the more haste and that I might show you that I do not impose upon you."

The good woman, being greatly frightened, gave him all she had; for this Ogre was a very good husband, though he ate up little children. Little Thumb, having thus got all the Ogre's money, came home to his father's house, where he was received with abundance of joy.

There are many people who do not agree in regard to this act of Little Thumb's, and pretend that he never robbed the Ogre at all, and that he only thought he might very justly take off his seven-leagued boots because he made no other use of them but to run after little

children. These folks affirm that they are very well assured of this, because they have drunk and eaten often at the fagot-maker's house. They declare that when Little Thumb had taken off the Ogre's boots he went to Court, where he was informed that they were very much in trouble about a certain army, which was two hundred leagues off, and anxious as to the success of a battle. He went, they say, to the King and told him that if he desired it, he would bring him news from the army before night.

The King promised him a great sum of money if he succeeded. Little Thumb returned that very same night with the news; and, this first expedition causing him to be known, he earned as much as he wished, for the King paid him very well for carrying his orders to the army. Many ladies employed him also to carry messages, from which he made much money. After having for some time carried on the business of a messenger and gained thereby great wealth, he went home to his father, and it is impossible to express the joy of his family. He placed them all in comfortable circumstances, bought places for his father and brothers, and by that means settled them very handsomely in the world, while he successfully continued to make his own way.

CINDERELLA

Once upon a time there was a gentleman who married, for his second wife, the proudest and most haughty woman that ever was seen. She had two daughters of her own, who were, indeed, exactly like her in all things. The gentleman had also a young daughter, of rare goodness and sweetness of temper, which she took from her mother, who was the best creature in the world.

The wedding was scarcely over, when the stepmother's bad temper began to show itself. She could not bear the goodness of this young girl, because it made her own daughters appear the more odious. The stepmother gave her the meanest work in the house to do; she had to scour the dishes, tables, etc., and to scrub the floors and clean out the bedrooms. The poor girl had to sleep in the garret, upon a wretched straw bed, while her sisters lay in fine rooms with inlaid floors, upon beds of the very newest fashion, and where they had looking-glasses so large that they might see themselves at their full length. The poor girl bore all patiently, and dared not complain to her father, who would have scolded her if she had done so, for his wife governed him entirely.

When she had done her work, she used to go into the chimney corner, and sit down among the cinders, hence she was called Cinderwench. The younger sister of the two, who was not so rude and uncivil as the elder, called her Cinderella. However, Cinderella, in spite of her mean apparel, was a hundred times more handsome than her sisters, though they were always richly dressed.

It happened that the King's son gave a ball, and invited to it all persons of fashion. Our young misses were also invited, for they cut a very grand figure among the people of the country-side. They were highly delighted with the invitation, and wonderfully busy in choosing the gowns, petticoats, and head-dresses which might best become them. This made Cinderella's lot still harder, for it was she who ironed her sisters' linen and plaited their ruffles. They talked all day long of nothing but how they should be dressed.

“For my part,” said the elder, “I will wear my red velvet suit with French trimmings.”

“And I,” said the younger, “shall wear my usual skirt; but then, to make amends for that I will put on my gold-flowered mantle, and my diamond stomacher, which is far from being the most ordinary one in the world.” They sent for the best hairdressers they could get to make up their hair in fashionable style, and bought patches for their cheeks. Cinderella was consulted in all these matters, for she had good taste. She advised them always for the best, and even offered her services to dress their hair, which they were very willing she should do.

As she was doing this, they said to her:—

“Cinderella, would you not be glad to go to the ball?”

“Young ladies,” she said, “you only jeer at me; it is not for such as I am to go there.”

“You are right,” they replied; “people would laugh to see a Cinderwench at a ball.”

Any one but Cinderella would have dressed their hair awry, but she was good-natured, and arranged it perfectly well. They were almost two days without eating, so much were they transported with joy. They broke above a dozen laces in trying to lace themselves tight, that they might have a fine, slender shape, and they were continually at their looking-glass.

At last the happy day came; they went to Court, and Cinderella followed them with her eyes as long as she could, and when she had lost sight of them, she fell a-crying.

Her godmother, who saw her all in tears, asked her what was the matter.

“I wish I could—I wish I could—” but she could not finish for sobbing.

Her godmother, who was a fairy, said to her, “You wish you could go to the ball; is it not so?”

“Alas, yes,” said Cinderella, sighing.

“Well,” said her godmother, “be but a good girl, and I will see that you go.” Then she took her into her chamber, and said to her, “Run into the garden, and bring me a pumpkin.”

Cinderella went at once to gather the finest she could get, and brought it to her godmother, not being able to imagine how this pumpkin could help her to go to the ball. Her godmother scooped out all the inside of it, leaving nothing but the rind. Then she struck it with her wand, and the pumpkin was instantly turned into a fine gilded coach.

She then went to look into the mouse-trap, where she found six mice, all alive. She ordered Cinderella to lift the trap-door, when, giving each mouse, as it went out, a little tap with her wand, it was that moment turned into a fine horse, and the six mice made a fine set of six horses of a beautiful mouse-colored, dapple gray.

Being at a loss for a coachman, Cinderella said, "I will go and see if there is not a rat in the rat-trap—we may make a coachman of him."

"You are right," replied her godmother; "go and look."

Cinderella brought the rat-trap to her, and in it there were three huge rats. The fairy chose the one which had the largest beard, and, having touched him with her wand, he was turned into a fat coachman with the finest mustache and whiskers ever seen.

After that, she said to her:—

"Go into the garden, and you will find six lizards behind the watering-pot; bring them to me."

She had no sooner done so than her godmother turned them into six footmen, who skipped up immediately behind the coach, with their liveries all trimmed with gold and silver, and they held on as if they had done nothing else their whole lives.

The fairy then said to Cinderella, "Well, you see here a carriage fit to go to the ball in; are you not pleased with it?"

"Oh, yes!" she cried; "but must I go as I am in these rags?"

Her godmother simply touched her with her wand, and, at the same moment, her clothes were turned into cloth of gold and silver, all decked with jewels. This done, she gave her a pair of the prettiest glass slippers in the whole world. Being thus attired, she got into the carriage, her godmother commanding her, above all things, not to stay till after midnight, and telling her, at the same time, that if she stayed one moment longer, the coach would be a pumpkin again, her

horses mice, her coachman a rat, her footmen lizards, and her clothes would become just as they were before.

She promised her godmother she would not fail to leave the ball before midnight. She drove away, scarce able to contain herself for joy. The King's son, who was told that a great princess, whom nobody knew, was come, ran out to receive her. He gave her his hand as she alighted from the coach, and led her into the hall where the company were assembled. There was at once a profound silence; every one left off dancing, and the violins ceased to play, so attracted was every one by the singular beauties of the unknown newcomer. Nothing was then heard but a confused sound of voices saying:—

“Ha! how beautiful she is! Ha! how beautiful she is!”

The King himself, old as he was, could not keep his eyes off her, and he told the Queen under his breath that it was a long time since he had seen so beautiful and lovely a creature.

All the ladies were busy studying her clothes and head-dress, so that they might have theirs made next day after the same pattern, provided they could meet with such fine materials and able hands to make them.

The King's son conducted her to the seat of honor, and afterwards took her out to dance with him. She danced so very gracefully that they all admired her more and more. A fine collation was served, but the young Prince ate not a morsel, so intently was he occupied with her.

She went and sat down beside her sisters, showing them a thousand civilities, and giving them among other things part of the oranges and citrons with which the Prince had regaled her. This very much surprised them, for they had not been presented to her.

Cinderella heard the clock strike a quarter to twelve. She at once made her adieus to the company and hastened away as fast as she could.

As soon as she got home, she ran to find her godmother, and, after having thanked her, she said she much wished she might go to the ball the next day, because the King's son had asked her to do so. As she was eagerly telling her godmother all that happened at the ball, her two sisters knocked at the door; Cinderella opened it. “How long

you have stayed!" said she, yawning, rubbing her eyes, and stretching herself as if she had been just awakened. She had not, however, had any desire to sleep since they went from home.

"If you had been at the ball," said one of her sisters, "you would not have been tired with it. There came thither the finest princess, the most beautiful ever was seen with mortal eyes. She showed us a thousand civilities, and gave us oranges and citrons."

Cinderella did not show any pleasure at this. Indeed, she asked them the name of the princess; but they told her they did not know it, and that the King's son was very much concerned, and would give all the world to know who she was. At this Cinderella, smiling, replied:—

"Was she then so very beautiful? How fortunate you have been! Could I not see her? Ah! dear Miss Charlotte, do lend me your yellow suit of clothes which you wear every day."

"Ay, to be sure!" cried Miss Charlotte; "lend my clothes to such a dirty Cinderwench as thou art! I should be out of my mind to do so."

Cinderella, indeed, expected such an answer and was very glad of the refusal; for she would have been sadly troubled if her sister had lent her what she jestingly asked for. The next day the two sisters went to the ball, and so did Cinderella, but dressed more magnificently than before. The King's son was always by her side, and his pretty speeches to her never ceased. These by no means annoyed the young lady. Indeed, she quite forgot her godmother's orders to her, so that she heard the clock begin to strike twelve when she thought it could not be more than eleven. She then rose up and fled, as nimble as a deer. The Prince followed, but could not overtake her. She left behind one of her glass slippers, which the Prince took up most carefully. She got home, but quite out of breath, without her carriage, and in her old clothes, having nothing left her of all her finery but one of the little slippers, fellow to the one she had dropped. The guards at the palace gate were asked if they had not seen a princess go out, and they replied they had seen nobody go out but a young girl, very meanly dressed, and who had more the air of a poor country girl than of a young lady.

When the two sisters returned from the ball, Cinderella asked them if they had had a pleasant time, and if the fine lady had been there.

They told her, yes; but that she hurried away the moment it struck twelve, and with so much haste that she dropped one of her little glass slippers, the prettiest in the world, which the King's son had taken up. They said, further, that he had done nothing but look at her all the time, and that most certainly he was very much in love with the beautiful owner of the glass slipper.

What they said was true; for a few days after the King's son caused it to be proclaimed, by sound of trumpet, that he would marry her whose foot this slipper would fit exactly. They began to try it on the princesses, then on the duchesses, and then on all the ladies of the Court; but in vain. It was brought to the two sisters, who did all they possibly could to thrust a foot into the slipper, but they could not succeed. Cinderella, who saw this, and knew her slipper, said to them, laughing:—

“Let me see if it will not fit me.”

Her sisters burst out a-laughing, and began to banter her. The gentleman who was sent to try the slipper looked earnestly at Cinderella, and, finding her very handsome, said it was but just that she should try, and that he had orders to let every lady try it on.

He obliged Cinderella to sit down, and, putting the slipper to her little foot, he found it went on very easily, and fitted her as if it had been made of wax. The astonishment of her two sisters was great, but it was still greater when Cinderella pulled out of her pocket the other slipper and put it on her foot. Thereupon, in came her godmother, who, having touched Cinderella's clothes with her wand, made them more magnificent than those she had worn before.

And now her two sisters found her to be that beautiful lady they had seen at the ball. They threw themselves at her feet to beg pardon for all their ill treatment of her. Cinderella took them up, and, as she embraced them, said that she forgave them with all her heart, and begged them to love her always.

She was conducted to the young Prince, dressed as she was. He thought her more charming than ever, and, a few days after, married her. Cinderella, who was as good as she was beautiful, gave her two sisters a home in the palace, and that very same day married them to two great lords of the Court.

BLUE BEARD

Once upon a time there was a man who had fine houses, both in town and country, a deal of silver and gold plate, carved furniture, and coaches gilded all over. But unhappily this man had a blue beard, which made him so ugly and so terrible that all the women and girls ran away from him.

One of his neighbors, a lady of quality, had two daughters who were perfect beauties. He asked for one of them in marriage, leaving to her the choice of which she would bestow on him. They would neither of them have him, and they sent him backward and forward from one to the other, neither being able to make up her mind to marry a man who had a blue beard. Another thing which made them averse to him was that he had already married several wives, and nobody knew what had become of them.

Blue Beard, to become better acquainted, took them, with their mother and three or four of their best friends, with some young people of the neighborhood to one of his country seats, where they stayed a whole week.

There was nothing going on but pleasure parties, hunting, fishing, dancing, mirth, and feasting. Nobody went to bed, but all passed the night in playing pranks on each other. In short, everything succeeded so well that the youngest daughter began to think that the beard of the master of the house was not so very blue, and that he was a very civil gentleman. So as soon as they returned home, the marriage was concluded.

About a month afterward Blue Beard told his wife that he was obliged to take a country journey for six weeks at least, upon business of great importance. He desired her to amuse herself well in his absence, to send for her friends, to take them into the country, if she pleased, and to live well wherever she was.

“Here,” said he, “are the keys of the two great warehouses wherein I have my best furniture: these are of the room where I keep my silver and gold plate, which is not in everyday use; these open my safes, which hold my money, both gold and silver; these my caskets of

jewels; and this is the master-key to all my apartments. But as for this little key, it is the key of the closet at the end of the great gallery on the ground floor. Open them all; go everywhere; but as for that little closet, I forbid you to enter it, and I promise you surely that, if you open it, there's nothing that you may not expect from my anger."

She promised to obey exactly all his orders; and he, after having embraced her, got into his coach and proceeded on his journey.

Her neighbors and good friends did not stay to be sent for by the new-married lady, so great was their impatience to see all the riches of her house, not daring to come while her husband was there, because of his blue beard, which frightened them. They at once ran through all the rooms, closets, and wardrobes, which were so fine and rich, and each seemed to surpass all others. They went up into the warehouses, where was the best and richest furniture; and they could not sufficiently admire the number and beauty of the tapestry, beds, couches, cabinets, stands, tables, and looking-glasses, in which you might see yourself from head to foot. Some of them were framed with glass, others with silver, plain and gilded, the most beautiful and the most magnificent ever seen.

They ceased not to praise and envy the happiness of their friend, who, in the meantime, was not at all amused by looking upon all these rich things, because of her impatience to go and open the closet on the ground floor. Her curiosity was so great that, without considering how uncivil it was to leave her guests, she went down a little back staircase, with such excessive haste that twice or thrice she came near breaking her neck. Having reached the closet-door, she stood still for some time, thinking of her husband's orders, and considering that unhappiness might attend her if she was disobedient; but the temptation was so strong she could not overcome it. She then took the little key, and opened the door, trembling. At first she could not see anything plainly, because the windows were shut. After some moments she began to perceive that several dead women were scattered about the floor. (These were all the wives whom Blue Beard had married and murdered, one after the other, because they did not obey his orders about the closet on the

ground floor.) She thought she surely would die for fear, and the key, which she pulled out of the lock, fell out of her hand.

After having somewhat recovered from the shock, she picked up the key, locked the door, and went upstairs into her chamber to compose herself; but she could not rest, so much was she frightened.

Having observed that the key of the closet was stained, she tried two or three times to wipe off the stain, but the stain would not come out. In vain did she wash it, and even rub it with soap and sand. The stain still remained, for the key was a magic key, and she could never make it quite clean; when the stain was gone off from one side, it came again on the other.

Blue Beard returned from his journey that same evening, and said he had received letters upon the road, informing him that the business which called him away was ended to his advantage. His wife did all she could to convince him she was delighted at his speedy return.

Next morning he asked her for the keys, which she gave him, but with such a trembling hand that he easily guessed what had happened.

“How is it,” said he, “that the key of my closet is not among the rest?”

“I must certainly,” said she, “have left it upstairs upon the table.”

“Do not fail,” said Blue Beard, “to bring it to me presently.”

After having put off doing it several times, she was forced to bring him the key. Blue Beard, having examined it, said to his wife:—

“How comes this stain upon the key?”

“I do not know,” cried the poor woman, paler than death.

“You do not know!” replied Blue Beard. “I very well know. You wished to go into the cabinet? Very well, madam; you shall go in, and take your place among the ladies you saw there.”

She threw herself weeping at her husband’s feet, and begged his pardon with all the signs of a true repentance for her disobedience. She would have melted a rock, so beautiful and sorrowful was she; but Blue Beard had a heart harder than any stone.

“You must die, madam,” said he, “and that at once.”

“Since I must die,” answered she, looking upon him with her eyes all bathed in tears, “give me some little time to say my prayers.”

“I give you,” replied Blue Beard, “half a quarter of an hour, but not one moment more.”

When she was alone she called out to her sister, and said to her:—

“Sister Anne,”—for that was her name,—“go up, I beg you, to the top of the tower, and look if my brothers are not coming; they promised me they would come to-day, and if you see them, give them a sign to make haste.”

Her sister Anne went up to the top of the tower, and the poor afflicted wife cried out from time to time:—

“Anne, sister Anne, do you see any one coming?”

And sister Anne said:—

“I see nothing but the sun, which makes a dust, and the grass, which looks green.”

In the meanwhile Blue Beard, holding a great sabre in his hand, cried to his wife as loud as he could:—

“Come down instantly, or I shall come up to you.”

“One moment longer, if you please,” said his wife; and then she cried out very softly, “Anne, sister Anne, dost thou see anybody coming?”

And sister Anne answered:—

“I see nothing but the sun, which makes a dust, and the grass, which is green.”

“Come down quickly,” cried Blue Beard, “or I will come up to you.”

“I am coming,” answered his wife; and then she cried, “Anne, sister Anne, dost thou not see any one coming?”

“I see,” replied sister Anne, “a great dust, which comes from this side.”

“Are they my brothers?”

“Alas! no, my sister, I see a flock of sheep.”

“Will you not come down?” cried Blue Beard.

“One moment longer,” said his wife, and then she cried out, “Anne, sister Anne, dost thou see nobody coming?”

“I see,” said she, “two horsemen, but they are yet a great way off.”

“God be praised,” replied the poor wife, joyfully; “they are my brothers; I will make them a sign, as well as I can, for them to make haste.”

Then Blue Beard bawled out so loud that he made the whole house tremble. The distressed wife came down and threw herself at his feet, all in tears, with her hair about her shoulders.

“All this is of no help to you,” says Blue Beard: “you must die”; then, taking hold of her hair with one hand, and lifting up his sword in the air with the other, he was about to take off her head. The poor lady, turning about to him, and looking at him with dying eyes, desired him to afford her one little moment to her thoughts.

“No, no,” said he, “commend thyself to God,” and again lifting his arm—

At this moment there was such a loud knocking at the gate that Blue Beard stopped suddenly. The gate was opened, and presently entered two horsemen, who, with sword in hand, ran directly to Blue Beard. He knew them to be his wife’s brothers, one a dragoon, the other a musketeer. He ran away immediately, but the two brothers pursued him so closely that they overtook him before he could get to the steps of the porch. There they ran their swords through his body, and left him dead. The poor wife was almost as dead as her husband, and had not strength enough to arise and welcome her brothers.

Blue Beard had no heirs, and so his wife became mistress of all his estate. She made use of one portion of it to marry her sister Anne to a young gentleman who had loved her a long while; another portion to buy captains’ commissions for her brothers; and the rest to marry herself to a very worthy gentleman, who made her forget the sorry time she had passed with Blue Beard.

RUSSIAN LANGUAGE EDITION

КРАСНАЯ ШАПОЧКА

Жила - была в одной деревне маленькая девочка, такая хорошенькая, что лучше её и на свете не было. Мать любила ее без памяти, а бабушка еще больше.

Ко дню рождения подарила ей бабушка красную шапочку. С тех пор девочка всюду ходила в своей новой, нарядной красной шапочке. Соседи так про нее и говорили:

- Вот Красная Шапочка идет!

Как-то раз испекла мама пирожок и сказала дочке:

- Сходи-ка, Красная Шапочка, к бабушке, снеси ей этот пирожок и горшочек масла, да узнай, здорова ли она.

Собралась Красная Шапочка и пошла к бабушке в другую деревню.

Идет она лесом, а навстречу ей - серый Волк.

Очень захотелось ему съесть Красную Шапочку, да только он не посмел – где-то близко стучали топорами дровосеки. Облизнулся волк и спрашивает девочку:

- Куда ты идешь, Красная Шапочка?

А Красная Шапочка ещё не знала, как это опасно – останавливаться в лесу и разговаривать с волками. Поздоровалась она с волком и говорит:

- Иду к бабушке и несу ей вот этот пирожок и горшочек масла.

- А далеко ли живет твоя бабушка? – спрашивает волк.

- Довольно далеко, - отвечает Красная Шапочка. - Вон в той деревне, за мельницей, в первом домике с краю.

- Ладно, - говорит Волк, - я тоже хочу провести твою бабушку. Я по этой дороге пойду, а ты ступай по той. Посмотрим, кто из нас раньше придет.

Сказал это Волк и побежал что было духу по самой короткой дорожке.

А Красная Шапочка пошла по самой длинной дороге. Шла она не торопясь, по пути останавливалась, рвала цветы и собирала в букеты.

Не успела она еще до мельницы дойти, а Волк уже прискакал к бабушкиному домику и стучится в дверь:

Тук-тук!

- Кто там? - спрашивает бабушка.

- Это я, внучка ваша, Красная Шапочка, - отвечает Волк. - Я к вам в гости пришла, пирожок принесла и горшочек масла.

А бабушка была в то время больна и лежала в постели. Она подумала, что это и в самом деле Красная Шапочка, и крикнула:

- Дерни за веревочку, дитя мое,- дверь и откроется!

Волк дернул за веревочку - дверь и открылась.

Бросился Волк на бабушку и разом проглотил ее. Он был очень голоден, потому что три дня ничего не ел.

Потом закрыл дверь, улегся на бабушкину постель и стал поджидать Красную Шапочку. Скоро она пришла и постучалась:

Тук-тук!

- Кто там? - спрашивает Волк.

А голос у него грубый, хриплый.

Красная Шапочка испугалась было, но потом подумала, что бабушка охрипла от простуды и оттого у неё такой голос.

- Это я, внучка ваша,- говорит Красная Шапочка.- Принесла вам пирожок и горшочек масла.

Волк откашлялся и сказал потоньше:

- Дерни за веревочку, дитя мое,- дверь и откроется.

Красная Шапочка дернула за веревочку - дверь и открылась. Вошла девочка в домик, а Волк спрятался под одеяло и говорит:

- Положи-ка, внучка, пирожок на стол, горшочек на полку поставь, а сама приляг рядом со мной! Ты, верно, очень устала.

Красная Шапочка прилегла рядом с Волком и спрашивает:

- Бабушка, почему у вас такие большие руки?

- Это чтобы покрепче обнять тебя, дитя мое.

- Бабушка, почему у вас такие большие уши?

- Чтобы лучше слышать, дитя мое.

- Бабушка, почему у вас такие большие глаза?

- Чтобы лучше видеть, дитя мое.

- Бабушка, почему у вас такие большие зубы?

- А это чтоб скорее съесть тебя, дитя мое!

Не успела Красная Шапочка и охнуть, как Волк бросился на нее и проглотил вместе с башмачками и красной шапочкой.

Но, по счастью, в это самое время проходили мимо домика дровосеки с топорами на плечах.

Услышали они шум, вбежали в домик и убили Волка. А потом распороли ему брюхо, и оттуда вышла Красная Шапочка, а за ней и бабушка - обе целые и невредимые.

СПЯЩАЯ КРАСАВИЦА

Жили на свете король с королевой. Детей у них не было, и это их так огорчало, так огорчало, что и сказать нельзя.

И вот, наконец, когда они совсем потеряли надежду, у королевы родилась дочка.

Можете себе представить, какой праздник устроили по случаю её рождения, какое множество гостей пригласили во дворец, какие подарки приготовили!..

Но самые почётные места за королевским столом были оставлены для фей, которые в те времена ещё жили кое-где на белом свете. Все знали, что эти добрые волшебницы, стоит им только захотеть, могут одарить новорождённую такими драгоценными сокровищами, каких не купишь за все богатства мира. А так как фей было семь, то маленькая принцесса должна была получить от них не меньше семи чудесных даров.

Перед феями поставили великолепные обеденные приборы: тарелки из лучшего фарфора, хрустальные кубки и по ящичку из литого золота. В каждом ящичке лежали ложка, вилка и ножик, тоже из чистого золота и притом самой тонкой работы.

И вдруг, когда гости уселись за стол, дверь открылась, и вошла старая фея - восьмая по счету, - которую забыли позвать на праздник.

А забыли её позвать потому, что уже более пятидесяти лет она не выходила из своей башни, и все думали, что она умерла.

Король сейчас же приказал подать ей прибор. Не прошло и минуты, как слуги поставили перед старой феей тарелки из самого тонкого расписного фарфора и хрустальный кубок.

Но золотого ящичка с ложкой, вилкой и ножиком на её долю не хватило. Этих ящичков было приготовлено всего семь - по одному для каждой из семи приглашённых фей. Вместо золотых старухе подали обыкновенную ложку, обыкновенную вилку и обыкновенный ножик.

Старая фея, разумеется, очень обиделась. Она подумала, что король с королевой - невежливые люди и встречают её не так

почтительно, как следовало бы. Отодвинув от себя тарелку и кубок, она пробормотала сквозь зубы какую-то угрозу.

К счастью, юная фея, которая сидела рядом с ней, вовремя услышала её бормотание. Опасаясь, как бы старуха не вздумала наделить маленькую принцессу чем-нибудь очень неприятным - например, длинным носом или длинным языком, - она, чуть только гости встали из-за стола, пробралась в детскую и спряталась там за пологом кровати. Юная фея знала, что в споре обычно побеждает тот, за кем остаётся последнее слово, и хотела, чтоб ее пожелание было последним.

И вот наступила самая торжественная минута праздника:

феи вошли в детскую и одна за другой стали преподносить новорожденной дары, которые они для неё припасли.

Одна из фей пожелала, чтобы принцесса была прекраснее всех на свете. Другая наградила ее нежным и добрым сердцем. Третья сказала, что она будет расти и цвести всем на радость. Четвёртая обещала, что принцесса научится превосходно танцевать, пятая - что она будет петь, как соловей, а шестая - что она будет играть одинаково искусно на всех музыкальных инструментах.

Наконец, очередь дошла до старой феи. Старуха наклонилась над кроватью и, тряся головой больше от досады, чем от старости, сказала, что принцесса уколёт себе руку веретеном и от этого умрёт.

Все так и вздрогнули, узнав, какой страшный подарок приготовила для маленькой принцессы злая колдунья. Никто не мог удержаться от слёз.

И вот тут-то из-за полога появилась юная фея и громко сказала:

- Не плачьте, король и королева! Ваша дочь останется жива. Правда, я не так сильна, чтобы сказанное слово сделать несказанным. Принцесса должна будет, как это ни грустно, уколоть себе руку веретеном, но от этого она не умрёт, а только заснёт глубоким сном и будет спать целых сто лет, до тех пор, пока её не разбудит прекрасный принц.

Это обещание немного успокоило короля с королевой.

И всё же король решил попытаться уберечь принцессу от несчастья, которое предсказала ей старая злая фея. Для этого он под страхом смертной казни запретил всем своим подданным прять пряжу и хранить у себя в доме веретёна и прялки.

Прошло пятнадцать или шестнадцать лет. Как-то раз король с королевой и дочерью отправились в один из своих загородных дворцов.

Принцессе захотелось осмотреть древний замок. Бегая из комнаты в комнату, она, наконец, добралась до самого верха дворцовой башни.

Там, в тесной каморке под крышей, сидела за прялкой какая-то старушка и преспокойно пряла пряжу. Как это ни странно, она ни от кого ни слова не слыхала о королевском запрете.

- Что это вы делаете, тётушка? - спросила принцесса, которая в жизни не видывала прялки.

- Пряду пряжу, дитя мое, - ответила старушка, даже не догадываясь о том, что говорит с принцессой.

- Ах, это очень красиво! - сказала принцесса. - Дайте я попробую, выйдет ли у меня так же хорошо, как у вас.

Она быстро схватила веретено и едва успела прикоснуться к нему, как предсказание злой феи исполнилось, принцесса уколола палец и упала замертво.

Перепуганная старушка принялась звать на помощь. Люди сбежались со всех сторон.

Чего только они не делали: брызгали принцессе в лицо водой, хлопали ладонями по её ладоням, терли виски душистым уксусом, - всё было напрасно. Принцесса даже не пошевелинулась.

Побежали за королем. Он поднялся в башню, поглядел на дочку и сразу понял, что несчастье, которого они с королевой так опасались, не миновало их.

Утирая слёзы, приказал он перенести принцессу в самую красивую залу дворца и уложить там на постель, украшенную серебряным и золотым шитьём.

Трудно описать словами, как хороша была спящая принцесса. Она нисколько не побледнела. Щёки у неё оставались розовыми,

а губы красными, точно кораллы.

Правда, глаза у неё были плотно закрыты, но слышно было, что она тихонько дышит. Стало быть, это и в самом деле был сон, а не смерть.

Король приказал не тревожить принцессу до тех пор, пока не наступит час её пробуждения.

А добрая фея, которая спасла его дочь от смерти, пожелав ей столетнего сна, была в то время очень далеко, за двенадцать тысяч миль от замка. Но она сразу же узнала об этом несчастье от маленького карлика-скорохода, у которого были семимильные сапоги.

Фея сейчас же пустилась в путь. Не прошло и часу, как её огненная колесница, запряжённая драконами, уже появилась, возле королевского дворца. Король подал ей руку и помог сойти с колесницы.

Фея, как могла, постаралась утешить короля и королеву. Но, утешая их, она в то же время думала о том, как грустно будет принцессе, когда через сто лет бедняжка проснётся в этом старом замке и не увидит возле себя ни одного знакомого лица.

Чтобы этого не случилось, фея сделала вот что.

Своей волшебной палочкой она прикоснулась ко всем, кто был во дворце, кроме короля и королевы. А были там придворные дамы и кавалеры, гувернантки, горничные, дворецкие, повара, поварята, скороходы, солдаты дворцовой стражи, привратники, пажи и лакеи.

Дотронулась она своей палочкой и до лошадей на королевской конюшне, и до конюхов, которые расчёсывали лошадям хвосты. Дотронулась до больших дворовых псов и до маленькой кудрявой собачки по прозвищу Пуфф, которая лежала у ног спящей принцессы.

И сейчас же все, кого коснулась волшебная палочка феи, заснули. Заснули ровно на сто лет, чтобы проснуться вместе со своей хозяйкой и служить ей, как служили прежде. Заснули даже куропатки и фазаны, которые поджаривались на огне. Заснул вертел, на котором они вертелись. Заснул огонь, который их поджаривал.

И всё это случилось в одно-единое мгновение. Феи знают своё дело: взмах палочки - и готово!

Не заснули только король с королевой. Фея нарочно не коснулась их своей волшебной палочкой, потому что у них были дела, которые нельзя отложить на сто лет.

Утирая слёзы, они поцеловали свою спящую дочку, простились с ней и тихо вышли из залы.

Возвратившись к себе в столицу, они издали указ о том, чтобы никто не смел приближаться к заколдованному замку.

Впрочем, и без того к воротам замка невозможно было подойти. В какие-нибудь четверть часа вокруг его ограды выросло столько деревьев, больших и маленьких, столько колючего кустарника - терновника, шиповника, остролиста, - и всё это так тесно переплелось ветвями, что никто не мог бы пробраться сквозь такую чащу.

И только издали, да ещё с горы, можно было увидеть верхушки старого замка.

Всё это фея сделала для того, чтобы ни человек, ни зверь не потревожили покоя спящей принцессы.

Прошло сто лет. Много королей и королев сменилось за эти годы.

И вот в один прекрасный день сын короля, который царствовал в то время, отправился на охоту.

Вдалеке, над густым дремучим лесом, он увидел башни какого-то замка.

- Чей это замок? Кто в нём живёт? - спрашивал он у всех прохожих, попадавшихся ему по дороге.

Но никто не мог ответить толком. Каждый повторял только то, что сам слышал от других. Один говорил, что это старые развалины, в которых поселились блуждающие огоньки. Другой уверял, что там водятся драконы и ядовитые змеи. Но большинство сходилось на том, что старый замок принадлежит свирепому великану-людоеду.

Принц не знал, кому и верить. Но тут к нему подошёл старый крестьянин и сказал, кланяясь:

- Добрый принц, полвека тому назад, когда я был так же молод, как вы сейчас, я слышал от моего отца, что в этом замке спит непробудным сном прекрасная принцесса и что спать она будет ещё полвека до тех пор, пока благородный и отважный юноша не придёт и не разбудит её.

Можете себе представить, что почувствовал принц, когда услышал эти слова!

Сердце у него в груди так и загорелось. Он сразу решил, что ему-то и выпало на долю счастье пробудить ото сна прекрасную принцессу.

Недолго думая, принц дёрнул поводья и поскакал туда, где виднелись башни старого замка.

И вот перед ним заколдованный лес. Принц соскочил с коня, и сейчас же высокие толстые деревья, заросли колючего кустарника - всё расступилось, чтобы дать ему дорогу. Словно по длинной, прямой аллее, пошёл он к воротам замка.

Принц шёл один. Никому из его свиты не удалось догнать его: деревья, пропустив принца, сразу же сомкнулись за его спиной, а кусты опять переплелись ветвями. Это могло бы испугать кого угодно, но принц был молод и смел. К тому же ему так хотелось разбудить прекрасную принцессу, что он и думать забыл обо всякой опасности.

Ещё сотня шагов - и он очутился на просторном дворе перед замком. Принц посмотрел направо, налево, и кровь похолодела у него в жилах. Вокруг него лежали, сидели, стояли, прислонившись к стене, какие-то люди в старинной одежде. Все они были неподвижны, как мёртвые.

Но, взглядевшись в красные, лоснящиеся лица привратников, принц понял, что они вовсе не умерли, а просто спят. В руках у них были кубки, а в кубках ещё не высохло вино. Должно быть, сон застиг их в ту минуту, когда они собирались осушить чаши до дна.

Принц миновал большой двор, вымощенный мраморными плитами, поднялся по лестнице и вошёл в первую комнату. Там, выстроившись в ряд и опершись на свои алебарды, храпели всюю воины дворцовой стражи.

Он прошёл целый ряд богато убранных покоев. В каждом из них вдоль стен и вокруг столов принц видел множество разодетых дам и нарядных кавалеров. Все они тоже крепко спали, кто стоя, кто сидя.

И вот перед ним, наконец, комната с золочёными стенами и золочёным потолком. Он вошёл и остановился.

На постели, полог которой был откинут, покоилась прекрасная юная принцесса лет пятнадцати-шестнадцати (если не считать того столетия, которое она проспала).

Принц невольно закрыл глаза: красота её так сияла, что даже золото вокруг неё казалось тусклым и бледным, Он тихо приблизился и опустился перед ней на колени.

В это самое мгновение час, назначенный доброй феей, пробил.

Принцесса проснулась, открыла глаза и взглянула на своего избавителя.

- Ах, это вы, принц? - сказала она. - Наконец-то! Долго же вы заставили ждать себя...

Не успела она договорить эти слова, как всё кругом пробудилось.

Первая подала голос маленькая собачка по прозвищу Пуфф, которая лежала у ног принцессы. Она звонко затыкала, увидев незнакомого человека, и со двора ей ответили хриплым лаем сторожевые псы. Заржали в конюшне лошади, заворковали голуби под крышей.

Огонь в печи затрещал что было мочи, и фазаны, которых повара не успели дожарить сто лет тому назад, зарумянились в одну минуту.

Слуги под присмотром дворецкого уже накрывали на стол в зеркальной столовой. А придворные дамы в ожидании завтрака поправляли растрепавшиеся за сто лет локоны и улыбались своим заспанным кавалерам.

В комнате дворцовой стражи воины снова занялись своим обычным делом - затопали каблуками и загремели оружием.

А привратники, сидевшие у входа во дворец, наконец осушили кубки и опять наполнили их добрым вином, которое за сто лет стало, конечно, старше и лучше.

Весь замок от флага на башне до винного погреба ожил и зашумел.

А принц и принцесса ничего не слышали. Они глядели друг на друга и не могли наглядеться. Принцесса позабыла, что ничего не ела уже целый век, да и принц не вспоминал о том, что у него с утра не было во рту маковой росинки. Они разговаривали целых четыре часа и не успели сказать даже половины того, что хотели.

Но все остальные не были влюблены и поэтому умирали от голода.

Наконец старшая фрейлина, которой хотелось есть так же сильно, как и всем другим, не вытерпела и доложила принцессе, что завтрак подан.

Принц подал руку своей невесте и повёл её в столовую. Принцесса была великолепно одета и с удовольствием поглядывала на себя в зеркала, а влюблённый принц, разумеется, ни слова не сказал ей о том, что фасон её платья вышел из моды по крайней мере сто лет назад и что такие рукава и воротники не носят со времён его прапрабабушки.

Впрочем, и в старомодном платье она была лучше всех на свете.

Жених с невестой уселись за стол. Самые знатные кавалеры подавали им различные кушанья старинной кухни. А скрипки и гобои играли для них прелестные, давно забытые песни прошлого века.

Придворный поэт тут же сочинил новую, хотя немного старомодную песенку о прекрасной принцессе, которая сто лет проспала в заколдованном лесу. Песня очень понравилась тем, кто её слышал, и с тех пор её стали петь все от мала до велика - от поварят до королей.

А кто не умел петь песни, тот рассказывал сказку. Сказка эта переходила из уст в уста и дошла, наконец, до нас с вами.

КОТ В САПОГАХ

Один мельник, умирая, оставил трем своим сыновьям мельницу, осла да кота. Братья наследство сами поделили, в суд не пошли: жадные судьи последнее отберут. Старший получил мельницу, средний - осла, а самый младший - кота. Долго не мог утешиться младший брат: жалкое наследство ему досталось.

- Хорошо братьям, - говорил он. - Заживут они вместе, будут честно на хлеб зарабатывать. А я? Ну, съем кота, ну, сошью рукавицы из его шкурки. А дальше что? С голоду помирать?

Кот эти слова услышал, но виду не подал, а сказал:

- Хватит горевать. Дайте мне мешок, да закажите пару сапог, чтобы легче было ходить по лесам и полям, и вы увидите, что не так уж вас обидели, как вам сейчас кажется.

Хозяин сделал все, как велел кот. И едва кот получил все необходимое, как быстро обулся, перекинул через плечо мешок и отправился в ближайший заповедный лес.

Из мешка, в котором находились отруби и заячья капуста, кот устроил хитрую западню, а сам, растянувшись на траве и притворившись мертвым, стал поджидать добычу. Долго ждать ему не пришлось: какой-то глупый молодой кролик сразу же прыгнул в мешок. Кот, недолго думая, затянул мешок и отправился в королевский дворец. Когда кота ввели в королевские покои, он отвесил королю почтительный поклон и сказал:

- Ваше величество, вот кролик из лесов маркиза де Карабаса (такое имя выдумал он для своего хозяина). Мой господин велел мне преподнести вам этот скромный подарок.

- Поблагодари своего господина, - ответил король, - и скажи ему, что он доставил мне большое удовольствие.

Через несколько дней кот отправился на поле и снова расставил свою ловушку. На этот раз ему попались две жирные куропатки. Он проворно затянул шнурки на мешке и понес их королю. Король с радостью принял и этот подарок и даже

приказал наградить кота. С тех пор так и повелось: кот то и дело приносил королю дичь, будто бы убитую на охоте его хозяином. И вот как-то раз кот узнал, что король вместе со своей дочкой, прекрасной принцессой, собирается совершить прогулку в карете по берегу реки. Кот сразу же побежал к своему хозяину.

- Хозяин, если выслушаетесь моего совета, - сказал кот, - то считайте, что счастье у вас уже в руках. Все, что от вас требуется, - это пойти купаться на реку, в то место, куда я вам укажу. Остальное предоставьте мне. Хозяин послушно исполнил все, что посоветовал кот, хоть он совсем и не понимал, для чего все это нужно. Как раз, когда он купался, королевская карета выехала на берег реки. Кот со всех ног кинулся к карете и закричал:

- Сюда! Скорее! Помогите! Маркиз де Карабас тонет!

Король, услышав эти крики, приоткрыл дверцу кареты. Он сразу же узнал кота, который так часто приносил ему подарки, и сейчас же послал своих слуг выручать маркиза де Карабаса. В то время, как бедного маркиза вытаскивали из реки, кот рассказал королю, что во время купания у его господина воры украли всю одежду. (На самом же деле хитрец припрятал бедное платье хозяина под большим камнем).

Король немедленно приказал принести для маркиза де Карабаса один из лучших нарядов королевского гардероба. Все вышло как нельзя лучше. Король отнесся к сыну мельника очень ласково и даже пригласил сесть в карету и принять участие в прогулке. Да и королевской дочери юноша приглянулся. Уж очень королевское платье было ему к лицу. Кот, радуясь, что все идет, как он задумал, весело побежал перед каретой. По дороге он увидел крестьян, косивших на лугу траву.

- Кому принадлежит этот луг?

- Страшному людоеду, который живет в замке, - ответили косари.

- Сейчас сюда приедет король, — крикнул кот, - и если вы не скажете, что этот луг принадлежит маркизу де Карабасу, вас всех изрубят на мелкие кусочки!

Тут как раз подъехала королевская карета и король, выглянув из окна, спросил, кому принадлежит этот луг.

- Маркизу де Карабасу! - ответили в один голос косари, испуганные угрозами кота. Сын мельника не поверил своим ушам, зато король остался доволен и сказал:

- Дорогой маркиз! У вас замечательный луг!

А между тем кот бежал все дальше и дальше, пока не увидел жнецов, работающих в поле.

- Кому принадлежит это поле? - спросил их кот.

- Страшному людоеду, - ответили они.

- Сейчас сюда приедет король, - опять крикнул кот, - и если вы не скажете, что это поле принадлежит маркизу де Карабасу, вас изрубят на мелкие кусочки!

Через минуту к жнецам подъехал король и спросил, чьи это поля они жнут.

- Поля маркиза де Карабаса, - был ответ.

Король от удовольствия захлопал в ладоши и сказал:

- Дорогой маркиз! У вас замечательные поля!

А кот все бежал и бежал впереди кареты, и всем, кто попадался навстречу, велел говорить одно и то же: "Это дом маркиза де Карабаса, это мельница маркиза де Карабаса, это сад маркиза де Карабаса..."

И вот, наконец, кот прибежал к воротам прекрасного замка, где жил очень богатый и страшный людоед, тот самый, которому принадлежали все земли, по которым проехала королевская карета.

Кот заранее разузнал все об этом великане. Его сила была в том, что он мог превращаться в различных зверей - слона, льва, мышь...

Кот подошел к замку и попросил допустить его к хозяину.

Людоед принял кота со всей учтивостью, на какую был только способен: ведь он никогда не видел, чтобы кот разгуливал в сапогах, да еще и говорил человеческим голосом.

- Мне говорили, - промурлыкал кот, - что вы умеете превращаться в любого зверя. Ну, скажем, в льва или слона...

- Могу! - засмеялся людоед. - И, чтобы доказать тебе это, сейчас же обернусь львом. Смотри же!

Кот так испугался, увидев перед собой льва, что в мгновение ока взобрался на крышу прямо по водосточной трубе. Это было не только трудно, но даже и опасно, потому что в сапогах не так-то просто ходить по гладкой черепице. Лишь когда великан вновь принял свое прежнее обличие, кот спустился с крыши и признался людоеду, что едва не умер от страха.

- А еще меня уверяли, - сказал кот, - но этому-то я уж никак не поверю, что будто бы вы можете превратиться даже в самых маленьких животных. Например, обернуться крысой или мышкой. Должен признаться, что считаю это совершенно невозможным.

- Ах, вот как! Считаешь невозможным? - заревел великан. - Так смотри же!

В то же мгновение великан превратился в очень маленькую мышку. Мышка проворно побежала по полу. И тут кот, на то ведь он и кот, кинулся на мышку, поймал ее и съел. Так и не стало страшного людоеда.

Тем временем король проезжал мимо прекрасного замка и пожелал посетить его.

Кот услышал, как на подъездном мосту стучат колеса кареты, и выбежал навстречу королю.

- Милости просим пожаловать в замок маркиза де Карабаса, ваше величество! - сказал кот.

- Неужели и этот замок тоже ваш, господин маркиз! - воскликнул король. - Трудно представить себе что-нибудь более красивое. Это настоящий дворец! А внутри он наверное еще лучше, и если вы не возражаете, мы сейчас же пойдем и осмотрим его.

- Король пошел впереди, а маркиз подал руку прекрасной принцессе.

- Все втроем они вошли в великолепную залу, где был уже приготовлен отменный ужин. (В тот день людоед ждал в гости приятелей, но они не посмели явиться, узнав, что в замке король.)

Король был так очарован достоинствами и богатством маркиза де Карабаса, что, осушив несколько кубков, сказал:

- Вот что, господин маркиз. Только от вас зависит, женитесь вы на моей дочери или нет.

Маркиз обрадовался этим словам еще больше, чем неожиданному богатству, поблагодарил короля за великую честь и, конечно же, согласился жениться на прекраснейшей в мире принцессе.

Свадьбу отпраздновали в тот же день.

После этого кот в сапогах сделался очень важным господином и ловит мышей только для забавы.

МАЛЬЧИК С ПАЛЬЧИК

Жил был однажды дровосек, и было у них с женой семеро сыновей: два близнеца по десять лет, два близнеца по девять лет, два близнеца по восемь лет и один младшенький семи лет. Он был очень маленький и молчаливый. Когда он родился, то был ростом не больше вашего пальца, поэтому его и называли Мальчик-с-пальчик. Он был очень умен, хотя родители и братья считали его дурачком, поскольку он все время молчал. Но зато он отлично умел слушать собеседника. Дровосек был очень беден, и семья постоянно жила впроголодь. Однажды случилась засуха, и погиб весь урожай. Везде наступил голод. Однажды вечером дровосек сказал своей жене:

- Что же нам делать? Я люблю своих сыновей, но мое сердце разрывается от боли, когда я вижу, что они умирают от голода. Завтра мы отведем их в чащу леса и оставим там.

- Нет! Это было бы слишком жестоко, - вскричала его жена. Она понимала, что еды достать негде, но без памяти любила своих дорогих сыновей.

- В лесу у них есть шанс спастись, - сказал дровосек. - А дома они уж точно умрут.

Его жена зарыдала и согласилась.

Мальчик-с-пальчик не спал и слышал весь разговор родителей. Он моментально придумал план. Он вышел во двор, наполнил свои карманы блестящей галькой и вернулся домой спать.

Наутро дровосек повел сыновей далеко в лес.

Пока он рубил деревья, дети собирали хворост. Потихоньку дровосек все отходил от детей дальше и дальше, пока совсем не потерял их из виду. В одиночестве он вернулся домой.

Когда мальчики увидели, что их отец исчез, они очень испугались. Но Мальчик-с-пальчик знал дорогу домой, потому что пока они шли, он бросал из карманов блестящие камешки, по которым можно было вернуться назад. Поэтому он сказал братьям:

- Не плачьте. Идите за мной, и я приведу вас обратно к дому.

Следуя за младшим братом, дети пришли домой. Они сели на скамеечку, боясь войти в дом, и стали прислушиваться к тому, что происходило внутри.

Они не подозревали, что пока их не было дома, у дровосека произошел приятный сюрприз. Человек, который давным-давно занимал у него деньги, наконец-то вернул свой долг, и дровосек с женой на радостях накупили много вкусной еды.

Когда голодные муж с женой сели есть, жена начала опять плакать:

- Как бы я хотела, чтобы мои дорогие сыночки были сейчас здесь. Я бы приготовила им вкусный обед.

Мальчики услышали ее.

- Мы здесь, матушка! - закричали они. Они вбежали в дом и сели за вкусный ужин.

Радостная семья счастливо зажила вновь. Но скоро деньги кончились, и дровосек опять впал в отчаянье. Он сказал жене, что опять уведет детей в лес, но теперь уже подальше и поглубже. Мальчик-с-пальчик опять услышал их разговор. Он решил снова набрать камешков, но не смог, так как все двери были заперты на замки.

На следующий день, перед их уходом, матушка дала им на завтрак хлеба. Мальчик-с-пальчик не стал есть свой кусок, а припрятал его, чтобы по крошкам разбросать его вдоль дороги вместо камешков.

Они зашли в самую глубокую чащу леса. Пока дети трудились в поте лица, отец оставил их и скрылся. Мальчик-с-пальчик ничуть не волновался, поскольку был уверен, что найдет дорогу к дому по хлебным крошкам. Но когда он стал их искать, то обнаружил, что птицы съели все хлебные крошки.

Дети в отчаянии плутали и плутали по лесу. Наступила ночь, и подул холодный сильный ветер. Мальчики промочили свои ботинки. Пошел сильный холодный дождь. Мальчик-с-пальчик вскарабкался на дерево посмотреть, не видно ли дороги домой. Далеко в левой стороне он увидел огонек. Он слез с дерева и повел братьев налево.

На краю леса они увидели домик с огоньками в окошечках. Они постучались в дверь, и женский голос ответил им, что они могут войти. Они вошли и Мальчик-с-пальчик сказал женщине, вышедшей к ним навстречу:

- Мадам! Мы потерялись в лесу. Не будете ли вы так добры разрешить нам переночевать здесь?

- Ах, вы, бедные крошки! - запричитала женщина. - Знаете ли вы, что этот дом принадлежит страшному людоеду, который обожает маленьких мальчиков?

Сбившись в кучку, холодные, промокшие до костей, голодные мальчики стояли в нерешительности у двери.

- Что же нам делать? - спросил Мальчик-с-пальчик. - Если мы опять пойдем в лес, волки уж точно съедят нас. Может быть, ваш муж окажется добрее волков.

- Хорошо, - ответила жена людоеда. - Входите и согрейтесь у огня. Едва мальчики успели просушить свою мокрую одежду, раздался жуткий стук в дверь. Это пришел людоед! Его жена быстро спрятала детей под кровать и отворила дверь людоеду. Людоед ввалился в комнату и сел за стол есть. Вдруг он начал принюхиваться.

- Я чувствую запах живого мяса, - заревел людоед страшным голосом.

- Я зарезала сегодня гуся, - сказала жена.

- Я чувствую запах человеческого мяса, - еще громче заорал людоед. - Ты не обманешь меня.

Он подошел к кровати и заглянул под нее. Он вытащил за ноги мальчиков одного за другим.

- Отлично! - захохотал он. - Семь лакомых молоденьких мальчиков. Я приготовлю из них отличный десерт для вечеринки, на которую я пригласил моих друзей.

Мальчики упали на колени и стали умолять людоеда пощадить их, но людоед пожирал их глазами, смачно облизываясь. Он наточил свой большой нож и схватил одного из мальчиков. Но не успел он замахнуться ножом, чтобы разрезать мальчика, как его жена подбежала к нему и, схватив его за руку, сказала:

- Совершенно незачем делать это сегодня. Мы успеем убить их и завтра.

- Замолчи! - заорал людоед.

Его жена быстро заговорила:

- Но они испортятся, пока ты соберешься их съесть. У нас в погребе очень много мяса.

- Ты права, - сказал людоед, отпуская мальчика. - Хорошенько накорми их и положи в постель. Мы подержим их несколько дней, чтобы они потолстели и стали вкуснее.

Добрая женщина была рада, что приключение закончилось так благополучно. Она сытно накормила их и уложила в комнате, где спали ее собственные дочери - молодые людоедки. Они все спали на одной большой кровати, и у каждой на голове была золотая корона. Они все были очень страшные: с крошечными глазками, крючковатыми носами и огромным ртом, из которого выставлялись гигантские острые зубы. В комнате стояла еще одна большая кровать. Жена людоеда уложила на нее мальчиков.

Мальчик-с-пальчик заметил золотые короны на головах людоедок. Он подумал: "А вдруг людоед изменит свое решение и захочет зарезать нас ночью?"

Он собрал шапки братьев и надел их на головы людоедских дочерей, а их золотые короны на своих братьев. И стал ждать.

Он оказался прав. Людоед, проснувшись, пожалел о своем намерении и решил действовать немедленно. Взяв в руку длинный-предлинный нож, он поспешил в соседнюю комнату. Он подошел к кровати, где спали мальчики, и стал ощупывать их головы. Нащупав золотые короны, людоед страшно испугался и запричитал:

- Я чуть было не зарезал моих маленьких девочек, хороших людоедочек.

Он подошел к другой кровати и нащупав шапочки сказал:

- А, вот и они.

Довольный, он быстро зарезал семерых своих дочерей и радостный отправился спать дальше.

Когда Мальчик-с-пальчик услышал, что людоед опять захрапел, он разбудил своих братьев. Они быстро оделись и убежали из этого дома.

На следующее утро людоед проснулся пораньше, чтобы успеть приготовить гостям вкусные мясные кушанья. Он отправился в детскую комнату, где, к своему ужасу, увидел семерых мертвых людоедочек.

- Они поплатятся за этот фокус, - в бешенстве заорал он и затопал ногами.

Он достал из сундука семимильные сапоги и поспешил вслед за братьями. Он пересек полгосударства за несколько шагов и вскоре оказался на дороге, по которой бежали мальчики. Они уже были близко к отцовскому дому, когда услышали позади себя сопение людоеда. Он перепрыгивал с горы на гору, перешагивал огромные реки, словно маленькие лужицы.

Мальчик-с-пальчик заметил в скале пещеру и быстро спрятался в нее вместе с братьями. Через несколько секунд появился людоед. Он очень устал, так как семимильные сапоги натерли ему ноги, и поэтому решил прилечь отдохнуть. Он повалился на землю, где находились братья, и захрапел.

Мальчик-с-пальчик сказал:

- Не беспокойтесь и бегите быстрее домой, пока он спит. Увидимся позже.

Мальчики убежали и скрылись в доме родителей. Между тем Мальчик-с-пальчик стащил с храпящего людоеда семимильные сапоги и надел их на себя. Конечно же, они были очень большие. Но секрет состоял в том, что они могли и увеличиваться и уменьшаться в зависимости от размера ноги, надевшего их человека. В секунду сапоги уменьшились и стали впору Мальчику-с-пальчику.

Он отправился в них к людоедской жене и сказал ей:

- Разбойники напали на вашего мужа и требуют выкуп, иначе они убьют его. Он попросил меня сообщить вам об этом и приказал собрать все его золото для выкупа. Он не хочет умирать.

Жена людоеда отдала ему все золотые монеты и ценные вещи людоеда. Мальчик-с-пальчик поспешил домой с мешком денег за плечами.

Людоед, проснувшись, обнаружил пропажу семимильных сапог. Но без них он не мог разыскать братьев и огорченный отправился домой.

Семья Мальчика-с-пальчика очень гордилась им.

- Мой младший сыночек хоть и очень мал ростом, - говорила его мать, - зато очень умен.

ЗОЛУШКА

Один человек, овдовев, женился снова. У него была дочка — молодая девушка. Вместе с мачехой в доме поселились и две ее дочери — злые и вздорные, как и их мать. Мачеха невзлюбила падчерицу и взвалила на нее самую грязную работу. После работы бедная девушка садилась в уголок возле камина прямо на золу. Вот и прозвали ее сестры в насмешку Золушкой. Сами они жили в неге и довольстве.

Однажды в королевском дворце решили устроить бал. Приглашены на него были все знатные и богатые люди. Приглашение получили и золушкины сестры. Они бросились примерять нарядные бальные платья, а Золушка должна была их одевать и причесывать, да еще терпеть нескончаемые капризы. В конце концов, приготовления закончились, и сестры с матерью отправились на бал. Золушка же осталась дома и плакала в уголке. Очень уж ей хотелось тоже поехать на бал, да куда там — в таком рваном, испачканном золой платье.

Наступил вечер, и в сумерках в комнату вошла старая фея. Она спросила плачущую Золушку:

— Ты очень хочешь попасть на королевский бал? Не плачь, помоги мне. Есть у вас большая тыква?

Тыква нашлась в кладовке. Фея прикоснулась к ней своей волшебной палочкой, и тыква превратилась в золоченую карету. Потом фея заглянула в мышеловку. Взмах волшебной палочкой — и сидевшие там мыши оборотились шестеркой породистых лошадей. Пригодилась и крысоловка, и толстая усатая крыса превратилась в важного кучера на передке кареты.

— А теперь, — сказала Золушке фея, — ступай в сад. Там за лейкой сидят шесть ящериц. Принеси их мне.

Золушка принесла ящериц, и фея тут же превратила их в шестерых слуг, одетых в расшитые золотом ливреи.

— Ну вот, — сказала фея, — теперь ты можешь отправиться на бал.

— А платье, — залилась слезами Золушка, — платья-то нет.

Взмах волшебной палочки — и старое, испачканное золой платье, превратилось в роскошный бальный наряд. На ногах у девушки засверкали чудесные хрустальные туфельки. Не помня себя от радости, Золушка села в карету, кучер щелкнул кнутом, лошади заржали.

— Запомни, — произнесла фея, — волшебство продлится только до полуночи. После того, как часы пробьют двенадцать, карета снова станет тыквой, лошади оборотятся мышами, а кучер — толстой крысой. Наряд же твой снова превратится в старое платье. Прощай!

Карета тронулась. Бал был в самом разгаре, когда принцу доложили, что приехала прекрасная неизвестная принцесса. Он сам выбежал встречать ее и повел в зал. Музыка стихла, все замерли, изумленные ее красотой. Молодой принц тут же пригласил гостью на танец. Музыка заиграла опять. Золушка танцевала так легко, что все снова залюбовалась ею. Принц не отпускал ее от себя весь вечер, не прикасался к угощению и не сводил глаз со своей дамы. Но время шло, и вдруг Золушка услышала, что часы пробили три четверти двенадцатого. Она встала, распрощалась со всеми и убежала так быстро, что никто не смог ее догнать.

Вернувшись домой, Золушка поблагодарила фею и спросила, нельзя ли и завтра ей поехать во дворец, ведь принц так просил...

В это время раздался стук в дверь — приехали сестры. У них только и разговоров было, что о неизвестной принцессе.

На другой день они снова отправились во дворец. Золушка приехала тоже — и была еще наряднее и красивее. Принц не отходил от нее, говорил такие приятные вещи, что она забыла обо всем. И вдруг часы стали бить полночь. Золушка вспомнила предупреждение феи.

Опрометью бросилась она из зала. На лестнице, ведущей в сад, она оступилась и потеряла свою хрустальную туфельку. Темнота скрыла девушку. Скрыла и то, как бальный наряд превратился в старое запачканное платье, а карета с лошадьми и кучером вновь стали тыквой, мышами и крысой. Бросившемуся вдогонку

принцу досталась лишь подобранная им на лестнице хрустальная туфелька.

Вернувшиеся с бала мачеха с дочками опять на все лады обсуждали появление на балу неизвестной Красавицы, а также ее поспешное бегство. Они не узнали в ней свою Золушку. Принц же не мог позабыть незнакомку и приказал разыскать ее.

По всему королевству разъезжали его придворные и примеряли хрустальную туфельку подряд всем девушкам. Наконец они приехали и в дом Золушки. Как ни старались ее сестры втиснуть свои ножищи в хрустальную туфельку — все напрасно. Придворные собрались было уже уходить, да спросили:

— Нет ли у вас еще какой-либо девицы в доме?

— Есть, — отвечали сестры, — да она у нас такая замарашка.

Все же позвали и Золушку. Примерили туфельку и — о, чудо! туфелька пришлась впору. Тогда Золушка достала из кармана вторую и надела ее, не говоря ни слова.

В это время дверь тихонько приоткрылась. В комнату вошла старая фея, дотронулась своей волшебной палочкой до бедного платья Золушки, и оно сразу же превратилось в пышный наряд, еще более прекрасный, чем накануне. Все ахнули!

Тут сестры и мачеха поняли, кто была та неизвестная красавица на балу. Они бросились к ней просить прощения. Золушка была не только хороша собой, но и добра: она простила их от всего сердца. Придворные подхватили Золушку и повезли во дворец. В тот же день сыграли свадьбу — принц женился на Золушке.

СИНЯЯ БОРОДА

Жил-был однажды человек, у которого водилось множество всякого добра: были у него прекрасные дома в городе и за городом, золотая и серебряная посуда, шитые кресла и позолоченные кареты, но, к несчастью, борода у этого человека была синяя, и эта борода придавала ему такой безобразный и грозный вид, что все девушки и женщины, бывало, как только завидят его, так давай бог поскорее ноги.

У одной из его соседок, дамы происхождения благородного, были две дочери, красавицы совершенные. Он посватался за одну из них, не назначая, какую именно, и предоставляя самой матери выбрать ему невесту. Но ни та, ни другая не соглашались быть его женою: они не могли решиться выйти за человека, у которого борода была синяя, и только перекорялись между собою, отсылая его друг дружке. Их смущало то обстоятельство, что он имел уже несколько жен и никто на свете не знал, что с ними случилось.

Синяя Борода, желая дать им возможность узнать его покороче, повез их вместе с матерью, тремя-четырьмя самыми близкими их приятельницами и несколькими молодыми людьми из соседства в один из своих загородных домов, где и провел с ними целую неделю. Гости гуляли, ездили на охоту, на рыбную ловлю; пляски и пиры не прекращались; сна по ночам и в помине не было; всякий потешался, придумывал забавные шалости и шутки; словом, всем было так хорошо и весело, что младшая из дочерей скоро пришла к тому убеждению, что у хозяина борода уж вовсе не такая и синяя и что он очень любезный и приятный кавалер. Как только все вернулись в город, свадьбу тотчас и сыграли.

По прошествии месяца Синяя Борода сказал своей жене, что он принужден отлучиться, по меньшей мере на шесть недель, для очень важного дела. Он попросил ее не скучать в его отсутствие, а напротив, всячески стараться рассеяться, пригласить своих приятельниц, повести их за город, если

вздумается, кушать и пить сладко, словом, жить в свое удовольствие.

- Вот, - прибавил он, - ключи от двух главных кладовых; вот ключи от золотой и серебряной посуды, которая не каждый день на стол ставится; вот от сундуков с деньгами; вот от ящиков с драгоценными камнями; вот, наконец, ключ, которым все комнаты отпереть можно. А вот этот маленький ключик отпирает каморку, которая находится внизу, на самом конце главной галереи. Можешь все отпирать, всюду входить; но запрещаю тебе входить в ту каморку. Запрещение мое на этот счет такое строгое и грозное, что если тебе случится - чего боже сохрани - ее отпереть, то нет такой беды, которой ты бы не должна была ожидать от моего гнева.

Супруга Синей Бороды обещалась в точности исполнить его приказания и наставления; а он, поцеловав ее, сел в карету и пустился в путь. Соседки и приятельницы молодой не стали дожидаться приглашения, а пришли все сами, до того велико было их нетерпение увидеть собственными глазами те несметные богатства, какие, по слухам, находились в ее доме. Они боялись прийти, пока муж не уехал: синяя борода его их очень пугала. Они тотчас отправились осматривать все покои, и удивлению их конца не было: так им все показалось великолепным и красивым! Они добрались до кладовых, и чего-чего они там не увидели! Пышные кровати, диваны, занавесы богачейшие, столы, столики, зеркала - такие огромные, что с головы до ног можно было в них себя видеть, и с такими чудесными, необыкновенными рамами! Одни рамы были тоже зеркальные, другие - из позолоченного резного серебра. Соседки и приятельницы без умолку восхваляли и превозносили счастье хозяйки дома, а она нисколько не забавлялась зрелищем всех этих богатств: ее мучило желание отпереть каморку внизу, в конце галереи.

Так сильно было ее любопытство, что, не сообразив того, как невежливо оставлять гостей, она вдруг бросилась вниз по потайной лестнице, чуть шеи себе не сломала. Прибежав к дверям каморки, она, однако, остановилась на минутку.

Запрещение мужа пришло ей в голову. “Ну, - подумала она, - будет мне беда за мое непослушание!” Но соблазн был слишком силен - она никак не могла с ним сладить. Взяла ключ и, вся дрожа как лист, отперла каморку. Сперва она ничего не разобрала: в каморке было темно, окна были закрыты. Но погодя немного она увидела, что весь пол был залит запекшейся кровью и в этой крови отражались тела нескольких мертвых женщин, привязанных вдоль стен; то были прежние жены Синей Бороды, которых он зарезал одну за другой. Она чуть не умерла на месте от страха и выронила из руки ключ. Наконец она опомнилась, подняла ключ, заперла дверь и пошла в свою комнату отдохнуть и оправиться. Но она до того перепугалась, что никаким образом не могла совершенно прийти в себя.

Она заметила, что ключ от каморки запачкался в крови; она вытерла его раз, другой, третий, но кровь не сходила. Как она его ни мыла, как ни терла, даже песком и толченым кирпичом - пятно крови все оставалось! Ключ этот был волшебный, и не было возможности его вычистить; кровь с одной стороны сходила, а выступала с другой.

В тот же вечер вернулся Синяя Борода из своего путешествия. Он сказал жене, что на дороге получил письма, из которых узнал, что дело, по которому он должен был уехать, решилось в его пользу. Жена его, как водится, всячески старалась показать ему, что она очень обрадовалась его скорому возвращению. На другое утро он спросил у нее ключи. Она подала их ему, но рука ее так дрожала, что он без труда догадался обо всем, что произошло в его отсутствие.

- Отчего, - спросил он, - ключ от каморки не находится вместе с другими?

- Я его, должно быть, забыла у себя наверху, на столе, - отвечала она.

- Прощу принести его, слышишь! - сказал Синяя Борода.

После нескольких отговорок и отсрочек она должна была наконец принести роковой ключ.

- Это отчего кровь? - спросил он.

- Не знаю отчего, - отвечала бедная женщина, а сама побледнела как полотно.

- Ты не знаешь! - подхватил Синяя Борода. - Ну, так я знаю! Ты хотела войти в каморку. Хорошо же, ты войдешь туда и займешь свое место возле тех женщин, которых ты там видела.

Она бросилась к ногам своего мужа, горько заплакала и начала просить у него прощения в своем непослушании, изъясняя притом самое искреннее раскаяние и огорчение. Кажется, камень бы тронулся мольбами такой красавицы, но у Синей Бороды сердце было тверже всякого камня.

- Ты должна умереть, - сказал он, - и сейчас.

- Коли уж я должна умереть, - сказала она сквозь слезы, - так дай мне минуточку времени богу помолиться.

- Даю тебе ровно пять минут, - сказал Синяя Борода, - и ни секунды больше!

Он сошел вниз, а она позвала сестру свою и сказала ей:

- Сестра моя Анна (ее так звали), взойди, пожалуйста, на самый верх башни, посмотри, не едут ли мои братья? Они обещались навестить меня сегодня. Если ты их увидишь, так подай им знак, чтоб они поторопились. Сестра Анна взойшла на верх башни, а бедняжка горемычная времени от времени кричала ей:

- Сестра Анна, ты ничего не видишь?

А сестра Анна ей отвечала:

- Я вижу, солнышко яснее и травушка зеленеет.

Между тем Синяя Борода, ухватив огромный ножище, орал изо всей силы:

- Иди сюда, иди, или я к тебе пойду!

- Сию минуточку, - отвечала его жена и прибавляла шепотом:

- Анна, сестра Анна, ты ничего не видишь?

А сестра Анна отвечала:

- Я вижу, солнышко яснее и травушка зеленеет.

- Иди же, иди скорее, - орал Синяя Борода, - а не то я к тебе пойду!

- Иду, иду! - отвечала жена и опять спрашивала сестру:

- Анна, сестра Анна, ты ничего не видишь?

- Я вижу, - отвечала Анна, - большое облако пыли к нам приближается.

- Это братья мои?

- Ах, нет, сестра, это стадо баранов.

- Придешь ли ты наконец! - вопил Синяя Борода.

- Еще маленькую секундочку, - отвечала его жена и опять спросила:

- Анна, сестра Анна, ты ничего не видишь?

- Я вижу двух верховых, которые сюда скачут, но они еще очень далеко. Слава богу, - прибавила она, погода немного. - Это наши братья. Я им подаю знак, чтоб они спешили, как только возможно.

Но тут Синяя Борода такой поднял гам, что самые стены дома задрожали. Бедная жена его сошла вниз и бросилась к его ногам, вся растерзанная и в слезах.

- Это ни к чему не послужит, - сказал Синяя Борода, - пришел твой смертный час.

Одной рукой он схватил ее за волосы, другою поднял свой страшный нож... Он замахнулся на нее, чтоб отрубить ей голову... Бедняжка обратила на него свои погасшие глаза:

- Дай мне еще миг, только один миг, с духом собраться...

- Нет, нет! - отвечал он. - Поручи душу свою богу!

И поднял уже руку... Но в это мгновение такой ужасный стук поднялся у двери, что Синяя Борода остановился, оглянулся... Дверь разом отворилась, и в комнату ворвались два молодых человека. Выхватив свои шпаги, они бросились прямо на Синюю Бороду.

Он узнал братьев своей жены - один служил в драгунах, другой в конных егерях, - и тотчас наострил лыжи; но братья нагнали его, прежде чем он успел забежать за крыльцо. Они прокололи его насквозь своими шпагами и оставили его на полу мертвым.

Бедная жена Синей Бороды была сама чуть жива, не хуже своего мужа: она не имела даже довольно силы, чтобы подняться и обнять своих избавителей. Оказалось, что у Синей Бороды не было наследников, и все его достояние поступило его вдове. Одну часть его богатств она употребила на то, чтобы

выдать свою сестру Анну за молодого дворянина, который уже давно был в нее влюблен; на другую часть она купила братьям капитанские чины, а с остальной она сама вышла за весьма честного и хорошего человека. С ним она забыла все горе, которое претерпела, будучи женою Синей Бороды.